

Marino Institute of Education

An Investigation into the Attitudes and Perceived Needs of the Early Learning and
Care Profession in Relation to Continuous Professional Development

Thesis

by

Gillian Mannion

Supervisor

Dr. Claire Dunne

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the award

of the

Degree of Masters in Education Studies

(Early Childhood Education)

4th June 2019

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly. This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution.

The work was done under the guidance of Dr. Claire Dunne at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin.

I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the participants for giving up their time and providing such a rich and valuable insight into the research topic.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Claire Dunne for her advice and help throughout.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and my husband Pat, for all his support and encouragement, enabling me to complete this work. Thank you.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	1
Chapter One.....	2
Expertise.....	4
Responsiveness.....	4
Recognition.....	4
Reflection.....	4
Integrity.....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	6
Introduction.....	6
Overview Of The Sector.....	7
Siolta, Aistear, Montessori and play based curriculums.....	9
Qualifications of ELC practitioners.....	12
Insights from the Department of Education and Skills inspections.....	16
Training and education for the ELC sector.....	17
Working conditions of the ELC sector.....	18
Chapter 3: Five Contexts for Assessing Professional Development Needs.....	21
Expertise.....	21

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How adults learn.	21
Practitioner contexts – formal and informal learning.	23
What practitioners want.	24
Responsiveness.	24
Pedagogies and parents in ELC.	24
Recognition.	28
“Motherly Love” negative discourse or positive pedagogy?	28
Bioecological model – recognition through change.	30
Reflection.	32
Skills and abilities.	32
Difficulties and challenges.	33
Integrity.	37
Leadership – skills and dispositions.	37
Chapter 4: Methodology.	41
Philosophical Approach to Data Analysis.	41
Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies.	42
Data Collection and Analysis.	46
Sampling.	47
Selection and Recruitment of Participants.	48
Informed Consent.	53

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Instrument	54
Semi-structured interviews.	54
Learner style questionnaire.	54
Interview Schedule – Categories From The Literature.	55
Pilot	56
Questioning Methodology	57
Bias	57
Challenges and Limitations	58
Researcher Positionality and Ethical Concerns	58
Conclusion	60
Chapter 5: Discussion	61
Overview of the Chapter	61
Interpretative Analysis - Coding	62
Learning Style and Preferred CPD Methods	63
Introduction.....	63
Respondents Attitude to Change – Aistear and Síolta	65
Introduction.....	65
Challenges and Opportunities in Responding to Parents and Children	69
Introduction.....	69
Recognising and Respecting Those Who Care and Those Who Value Care	75

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction.....	75
Expertise and status.	78
Government role in recognition.....	79
Market forces - Montessori and Play based services.....	80
The Challenge of Reflection in the Absence of CPD	81
Introduction.....	81
Context, culture and time.....	82
Reflection that works.....	84
Developing Leadership Skills for The ELC Setting	87
Introduction.....	87
Staff wellbeing.....	90
Supervision - skills and structures.....	90
CPD in management training – leading with integrity.....	91
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations	94
Bibliography	98
Appendix A: Legislation.....	114
Appendix B: Information and Consent Declaration	116
Appendix C: Biography of Respondents	118
Appendix D: Quality Guidelines and Empirical Findings.....	119
Area 1 – Quality of environments.....	119

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Area 2 – Quality of processes to support learning and development.	120
Area 3 – Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievement.....	121
Area 4 – Quality of management and leadership for learning	122
Appendix E: Interview Guide	124
Appendix F: E-mail to Services.....	126
Appendix G: Questionnaire	127

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

List of Figures

Figure 1: Levels of qualifications gained over the last three year.....	13
Figure 2: Staff working with children and Level of early years qualification in process.....	14
Figure 3: Kohl’s Learning Cycle.....	22
Figure 4: Bronfenbrenner and Morris - Bioecological model of development.....	31

List of Tables

Table 1: Number of children enrolled by age	8
Table 2: Percentage of services by curriculum approach and quality framework	9
Table 3: Leaver’s characteristics of highly regarded education systems	10
Table 4: Variables affecting wages in the early years sector.....	15
Table 5: Proposed annual pay scales (Mercer).....	18
Table 6: Percentage of services by organization type and urban/rural distribution	19
Table 7: Staff working directly with children	20
Table 8: Advantages and disadvantages of different methods of critical reflection	36
Table 9: Biography of respondents	50
Table 10: Description of respondents including area type, ratios and child age	51
Table 11: Time line of contacts	52
Table 12: Learner style result and CPD preference	64

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

The First Five Report (Government of Ireland, 2018) has acknowledged that there is diversity of learner type and need in the Early Learning and Care Sector (formerly Early Childhood Care and Education) however, the exact nature of those needs have not been examined, creating a research gap. This research addressed the research gap by asking: What are the opinions and needs of the Early Learning and Care profession in relation to Continuous Professional Development?

Having given an overview of the sector through the lens of Pobal, the Department of Education and Skills, and in the context of new policies, changes and challenges, this research explored the concept of continuous professional development in a comparative study by taking two of the main pedagogies in the sector - Montessori and Play-based groups and comparing their attitudes and needs in relation to CPD using a new understanding of the term 'professional' as developed by Molla and Nolan, (2018) in Australia. Attitudes to learning and an investigation into learner type provided an additional perspective through which to view CPD to explore goodness of fit with present teaching methodologies. Themes were extracted in relation to learner type and preference, and a re-evaluation of the term 'care' proved a thought-provoking avenue. Professionalisation through the means of a graduate workforce was explored, with an evaluation of the skills deficits that at present, create difficult working conditions and environments for ELC professionals in the absence of appropriate and transformational CPD.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Chapter One

This research is motivated by the publication in November 2018 of a new ten-year plan for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector entitled the “First Five” strategy (Government of Ireland, 2018), which highlights much of what has been achieved for children under five over the past decade and proposes new initiatives to professionalise the sector through Continuous Professional Development.

As acknowledged by the First Five strategy, the ELC workforce is hugely diverse, and as such, it predicts that practitioners will have a variety of needs and preferences in relation to their professional development journey. However, diversity of learner type, CPD preference and training need have not yet been analysed. Consequently, it does not seem prudent to engage on a national programme of funded training until practitioner opinion is assessed leading to greater practitioner ownership, engagement and success.

Therefore, my aim is to explore the nature of those needs and establish practitioners preferred methods of professionalisation by asking: – *What are attitudes and needs of Early Learning and Care practitioners in relation to continuous professional development?*

From this perspective, the focus of the research will be an interpretative and comparative enquiry into gaps in professional development and will be grounded in the experiences of respondents and mediated by policy and educator experience. In so doing it is envisaged that a spectrum of needs will be identified.

The research will focus on manager opinion in the Dublin City and County area. Ten Early Learning and Care services – five Montessori and five Play based - within large and small settings will be purposefully requested to participate.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Recent inspection reports (DES, 2018) have established a systemic need for CPD in early years education across the country, particularly in relation to training in Aistear, the National Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) and Síolta (CDCDE, 2006). Future proofing the sector also envisages a cultural shift towards professionalisation, brought about by gradual graduate infiltration (Government of Ireland, 2018). The present research builds on this data, adding practitioner voice, and in so doing, performs a deep macrosystemic analysis.

According to the Early Years Education Inspectorate, (DES, 2018) high quality ELC results in positive outcomes for children. Empirical evidence (DES, 2018; Pobal 2018) identifies that services are struggling to implement quality guidelines within Aistear (2009) and Síolta (CDCDE) a contractual requirement of all ELC settings and is predicted to become compulsory (Government of Ireland, 2018) with failure to implement quality standards necessitating possible grant withdrawal. Therefore, it is imperative that services interrogate their CPD need as a matter of urgency.

This study sets out to bridge the gap in research by building on a study by Molla and Nolan (2018). They investigated the opinions of early years practitioners in Australia in relation to what they deemed to be important in the context of professionalism. From that, they isolated a framework of five topics including expertise, responsiveness, recognition, reflection, and integrity (Molla and Nolan, 2018). Those topics will be used in the present study as the overarching framework from which to explore practitioner opinion and need in relation to professional development. As Play based and Montessori pedagogies constitute the bulk of services, they will be purposefully selected. A Learner Style Questionnaire (Kohl & Chapman, 2005-6) and Semi structured interview format will be chosen as the

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

research instruments to create data which will allow comparison, contrast and contradictions to emerge from respondent voices. The following represents themes as explored:

Expertise

This theme will examine respondents' attitude to their own learning style, their preferred CPD approach and their confidence in their ability to implement pedagogical content knowledge in relation to Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and quality standards in relation to Síolta (CDCDE).

Responsiveness

This theme explores how children and parents are responded to by practitioners within socio-cultural, constructivist and cognitivist pedagogical approaches through the lens of Aistear and Síolta and the unique ideology of Montessori.

Recognition

This theme looks at the self-perception of Early Learning and Care (ELC) practitioners - examining their feelings, attitudes and emotions in relation to status. It looks at whether a dichotomy between care and education still exists and asks if CPD will help status ambiguity.

Reflection

This theme looked at reflexivity – a skills that is integral to all aspects of child centred learning, adult planning and development strategies and examines how poor skills can damage inter and intra personal relationships in the absence of CPD.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Integrity

This theme explores how ELC professionals define and understand the term integrity and investigates practices of leadership with a view to exploring CPD need.

Chapter 2: Provides an overview of the ELC sector in Ireland, examining the emergence of Aistear, (NCCA, 2009) the play-based curriculum framework, Síolta, (2006) the Quality Standards Framework and its presence and strength across the ELC sector.

Chapter 3: Then each of the five components of Molla and Nolan's (2018) framework are presented in order explore the different dimensions of CPD that may be relevant to ELC practitioners in Ireland today.

Chapter 4: Examines the methodology of the study, the ethics, sampling, and considerations in relation to bias, sampling issues and limitations. It also includes researcher positionality.

Chapter 5: Discusses findings in relation to practitioner voice and extracts meaning from their accounts through coding and interpretative thematic analysis.

Chapter 6: Includes Conclusions and Recommendations in relation to the study, describing issues in relation to CPD, Care, and Leadership, and provides some contexts for future thought and research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The First Five (Government of Ireland, 2018) ten-year strategy proposes that there is now an obligation on the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector, formerly the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector to professionalise in keeping with curriculum frameworks, quality standards and empirical evidence (Aistear, NCCA 2009; Síolta, 2006; DES, 2016, 2018a and b).

Proposed measures include raising the status of ELC, making the “phased, supported and simultaneous implementation of Aistear and Síolta in all ELC settings” (p. 157) a statutory requirement, and making adherence to quality standards contingent on grant funding. It is proposed that failure to do so will result in possible financial and disciplinary measures. This has implications for all services in the ELC sector, where CPD has not been adequately engaged with. Professionalisation through up skilling and reskilling will be overseen by the proposed new Workforce Development Plan which will be graduate orientated and will establish “a career framework and leadership development opportunities” (p. 161).

Analysing professional needs is a complex task and so Molla and Nolan’s (2018) framework was selected. Their work was conducted in Australia, and was deemed relevant to the current study because it provided valuable avenues through which to explore the present research question in greater depth. Categories such as expertise, recognition, reflection, responsiveness, and integrity were thus mined for meaning within the literature review, with the aim of providing context and content so that comparisons, contradictions

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

and insights could be made between Montessori and Play based groups in order to ascertain differences in respondents CPD needs.

Overview Of The Sector

Moloney (2012) refers to Black and Gruen's definition of a profession as an "occupation based upon specific knowledge and training and regulated standards of performance" (Black and Gruen, 2005, p.52), requiring substantial training and education. Quinn (1996) describes the professional as a specialist who has acquired a wide body of learning and expertise gained from formal academic study and training – progressing from theory to practice. Labaree's (1992) perspective on professionalisation states that: "the upwardly mobile occupational group must establish that it has mastery of a formal body of knowledge that is not accessible to the lay person giving it special competence in carrying out a particular form of work" (p. 125). This represents a challenge for ELC practitioners who need to upskill or reskill, necessitating engagement with professional learning, leading to the further professionalisation of the sector.

An analysis of the sector reveals that at present, once a child reaches the age of two years eight months by September, he/she is eligible for two free preschool years. This means that a much younger cohort of children are now eligible to attend free preschool - increasing numbers substantially. According to Table 1 (Pobal, 2018, p, 61) 202,633 children were enrolled across early years services, with a national capacity of 213,654 with 59% aged between three and five.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 1

Number of children enrolled by age.

Age range	Survey data		Extrapolated		Based on extrapolated data	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18	Change	% Change
Up to 1 year (0-12 months)	2,982	3,109	3,542	3,637	95	3%
1 year+ to 2 years (13-24 months)	9,138	10,275	10,854	12,021	1,167	11%
2 years+ to 3 years (25-36 months)	16,169	18,049	19,206	21,117	1,911	10%
3 years+ to 4 years (37-48 months)	52,573	54,837	62,448	64,157	1,709	3%
4 years+ to 5 years (49-60 months)	43,561	47,454	51,743	55,519	3,776	7%
5 years+ to 6 years (61-72 months)	11,986	14,183	14,237	16,593	2,356	17%
6 years+ to 8 years (73-96 months)	11,007	13,036	13,075	15,252	2,177	17%
8 years+	9,331	12,254	11,084	14,337	3,253	29%
Total	156,747	173,197	186,190	202,633	16,443	9%

Note: Reproduced from Pobal (2018, p. 62). Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 – 2018, Dublin.

The theoretical underpinnings of The Aistear Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2009), Siolta’s Quality Framework (CDCDE, 2006), Play based, Montessori, HighScope, Naionra, Early Start and Steiner services form the basis of the sector today. Pobal indicates that play based services have risen by 9% between 2016/17 to 52% in 2017/18, predominating in rural areas while Montessori services are most prevalent in urban settings in as indicated in Table 2 (Pobal, 2018, p. 49).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 2

Percentage of services by curriculum approaches and quality framework

	Community	Private	Urban*	Rural *	Total
Aistear	84%	84%	84%	84%	84%
Síolta	76%	73%	74%	74%	74%
Play-based curriculum	59%	59%	58%	62%	59%
Montessori	11%	54%	45%	36%	42%
HighScope	19%	7%	10%	9%	10%
Naíonra	8%	5%	6%	5%	6%
Early Start	2%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Steiner	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%
ABA (ASD children)	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Froebel	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
None	6%	2%	3%	3%	3%
Other	5%	3%	4%	3%	3%
Total	1,068	2,860	2,552	1,371	3,928

*Five services could not be geo-coded and do not have an urban/rural classification.

Note: Reproduced from Pobal (2018, p. 49). Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 – 2018, Dublin.

Síolta, Aistear, Montessori and play based curriculums

There was no formal framework for quality assurance in ELC in Ireland prior to 2006. In 2002 the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (DES, 2013) set about a programme of research to build capacity in the ELC sector. Having engaged in a programme of research and mentoring, the quality framework was finalised. Síolta- The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CDCDE, 2006) was designed to improve quality in practice (Murphy, 2015), containing principles and standards encompassing interactions, parents and families, communities, curriculum, planning and evaluation and professional practice.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2005, Leavers isolated key indicators of a high quality pedagogy (Table 3) and regarded Te Whariki (New Zealand), High Scope (USA) and Reggio Emilio (Italy) as the cornerstones of Early Childhood Education models. In 2009, Aistear was launched, encompassing many of their philosophies and principles.

Table 3

Leavers (2005). Characteristics of highly regarded education systems

Number	Characteristic
1	Respect for children
2	An open framework (curriculum) approach
3	A rich environment
4	A process of representation
5	Communication, interaction and dialogue
6	Observation and monitoring

Note: Taken from The Curriculum as Means to Raise the Quality of Early Childhood Education: Implications for Policy. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, Vol 13 No. 1, 17 - 29

The Aistear Curricular Framework (NCCA, 2009) is a play orientated pedagogy used within preschools and in junior and senior infant primary school classes throughout the country and is used in tandem with a variety of other pedagogies that populate the ELC landscape (see Table 1). It is the result of extensive research and consultation with Early Years experts (Hayes, 2007, French, 2007, Kiernan, 2007, and Dunphy, 2008) and contains aims, goals and themes for creating holistic and integrated learning experiences. Aistear contains guidelines regarding parents, play, interactions and assessments, and includes suggestions and exemplars for practice, demonstrating its relevance to quality pedagogy, and is compatible with the Montessori curriculum (Murphy 2015).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Montessori Method was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in the last century in Italy to address the learning requirements of children with additional needs. Its success in *that* context, resulted in it being adopted in mainstream early years settings and gained international popularity due to its focus on academia and self-directed learning. A series of academic activities characterise the ideology where children ‘work’ at mastery of complex apparatus with increasing complexity and with minimal tutelage (Montessori, 1980). Children can choose apparatus according to strictly laid down rules of accomplishment (Colgan, 2016).

Piagetian theory is linked to clear stages of development, is exclusively constructivist, also regards the environment as the sole practitioner (Piaget, 1971) negating the pedagogical role, all of which are reflected in play-based pedagogies. According to Hayes & Kiernan (2012) “polarity between practitioner-directed and child-initiated early education programmes can be characterised as a difference in focus between an academic and play based curriculum” (p. 60). Indeed, both play-based and Montessori pedagogies have been criticised for relegating the practitioner to the position of mere observer so that the challenge for ELC practitioners in the context of Aistear is to encourage emergent and agentic play while encouraging a supportive practitioner role.

In 2010, Aistear became a requirement of all services contracted to provide the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE). Integrating both care *and* education equally (Hayes, 2007) then became the challenge for early years practitioners necessitating a highly trained and skilled workforce (Madden, 2012). However, due to its weak implementation, absence in legislation, lack of funding inspection systems or qualification

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

structures, the translation of Aistear and Síolta into practice was fragmented and undefinable up to 2018 when inspection reports were published (DES, 2018).

The EYEI report (DES, 2018, p. 22) included accounts of practitioner voice. They requested interventions including “ongoing training”, “refresher courses” and supports for owner/managers particularly within administration and management. They also indicating a need for CPD through “mentoring, advisory visits, information and resources” and cited challenging working conditions as a barrier to improving quality through engagement with CPD. It was also mentioned by a Montessori practitioner in the report that the Montessori Method was not respected within the inspection process (p. 23).

Qualifications of ELC practitioners.

In 2015, the basic entry level qualification to ELC was set - Fetac Level 5 being the primary course requirement for assistant workers and Fetac Level 6 “Supervision in Childcare” (no management training included) for room leader roles. Figure 1 (Pobal, 2018, p. 100) demonstrates that a clear majority of staff working with children (94%) currently have a Level 5 qualification or higher however, it also indicates that 38.6% of practitioners have a Level 5 qualification or *less*, representing two fifths of the early education practitioners’ cohort.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

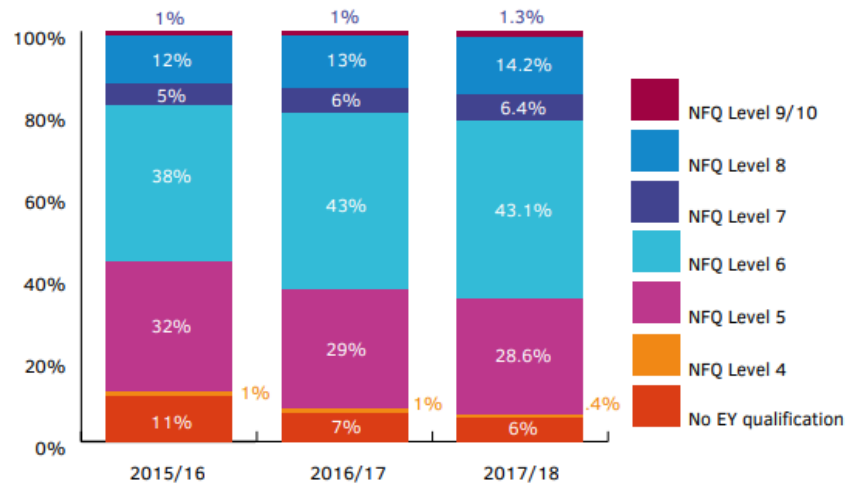


Figure 1. Levels of qualifications gained over the last three years. Reprinted from Pobal (2018, p. 100). 24th February 2019. Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 – 2018, Dublin.

Also in 2015, the DES developed a database containing recognised national and international Early Education orientated qualifications (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015) in a clear message that professionalisation was now linked to a graduate structure. Figure 2, (Pobal, 2018, p. 100) shows that 47% of Level Five ELC practitioners were in the process of qualifying to Level six at that time, this also indicates that only 14% of Level six practitioners are training to Level 7.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

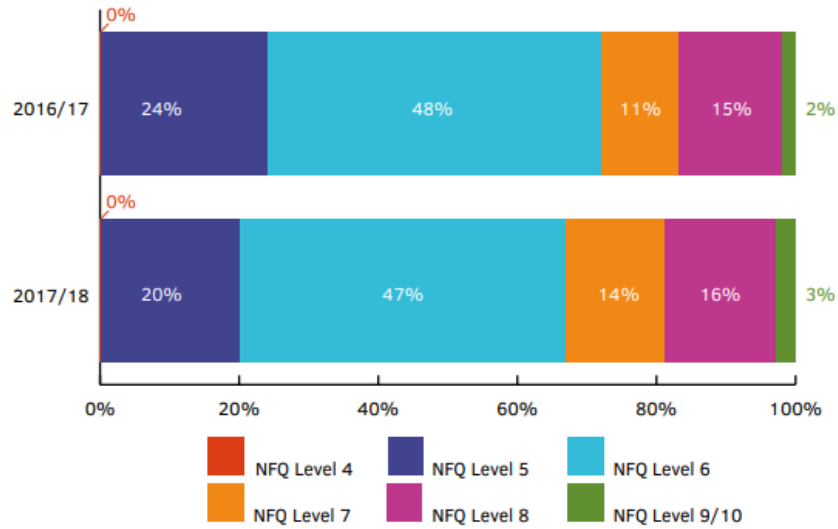


Figure 2. Staff working directly with children – level of early years qualification in process of attaining. Reprinted from Pobal (2018, p. 100). 24th February 2019. Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 – 2018, Dublin.

This low level of graduate CPD uptake is currently at 22%, (Government of Ireland, 2018) reflecting the fact that the influence of qualifications on remuneration resides at 10% representing fourth place overall as reflected in Table 4 (Pobal, 2018, p. 107). It must be emphasised that qualification level does not reflect Aistear expertise or training.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 4

Variables affecting wages in the early years sector

Variable	% influence on wages	
	2016/17 data	2017/18 data
Staff position/job title	21.5%	28.2%
Length of time working in early years sector	8.5%	11.6%
Length of time in service	10.0%	10.9%
Highest qualification attained	8.8%	10.0%
County	15.7%	9.7%
Non-contact hours per week	9.3%	9.4%
Hours contracted to work per week	6.2%	3.5%
Category of children cared for	4.2%	3.2%
Facility type (community/private)	3.2%	3.0%
Age band	3.3%	2.9%
Deprivation index (Electoral District)	<1%	2.3%
Urban/rural (CSO May 2018)	<1%	2.2%
On seasonal contract	1.5%	1.5%
Employment category	3.5%	1.2%
Other variables of negligible influence	2.4%	<1%

Note: Reproduced from Pobal (2018, p. 105). Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 – 2018, Dublin.

Motivating the sector to engage in CPD and to become graduate lead is an initiative of the “First Five” ten-year strategy (Government of Ireland, 2018) a complex task considering that 47% of all staff work part time with an average wage of €12.17 per hour (Pobal, 2018), 37% of services have lost between 1 and 3 staff members during 2018, and 43% of those have left the sector First Five, (Government of Ireland, 2018). According to Totenhagen, et al. (2016) low retention of personnel is associated with low wages creating negative outcomes for children, parents and staff. A high staff turnover (22% yearly) seems inevitable where practitioners are not provided with pensions, permanent contracts, funded

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

training, sick pay, or an incremental salary however, the introduction in 2016 of an annual “non-contact” payment was a welcome if token acknowledgment of practitioner out of hours work commitments.

In sum, although the First Five Strategy aims to create a graduate led sector, a high proportion of practitioners currently in the system have a Level 5 qualification, therefore, more incentives may be needed to encourage them to obtain formal qualifications.

Insights from the Department of Education and Skills inspections

The low level of qualifications obtained by practitioners may have negatively influenced practitioners’ performance as the EYEI report (DES 2018) outlined - stating that: “Many practitioners had not received basic training in Aistear and Síolta” (p. 24) leading to skill and competency deficits regarding observation, assessment, curricular design, implementation of plans and failing to reflect in them the needs of diverse groups. It also found that children’s oral language, metacognition, self-regulation, empathy and problem solving skills also needed to be supported (DES, 2018). In addition, the report noted that the needs of parents were often not addressed, identifying that they should be more informed regarding the value of play as opposed to focusing on “academic” expectations (p. 27). Addressing this need, the First Five strategy (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 140, goal C), proposes a new role for graduate practitioners involving the creation of “parent hubs” within settings to provide parents with additional information and support.

The inspectorate also cited a need for staff support and supervision, because “leadership is a critical factor in ensuring that quality improvement happens” (DES, 2018 p.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

25), continuing that the focus of the EYEI regarding solutions to improve quality entailed “professional education and training” (p. 24) for the sector.

Training and education for the ELC sector.

The Action Plan for Education (2018) states that Aistear training targets for 2018 were, “not achieved” nor has objective 38 (p. 12) to “support the further enhancement of professional qualifications and standards within the ECCE sector”. This is startling, considering that the Aistear National Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2009) has been in place since 2010 as a contractual requirement of all services regardless of pedagogical origin. The National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI, 2016) commenced a national Aistear training programme in 2019 - a welcome development considering the proposed initiative to make Aistear/ Síolta training compulsory and a funding requirement of all ECCE settings (Government of Ireland, 2018 p. 157). In the absence of significant CPD, managers frequently have to rely on the “the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (2016), a self-evaluative tool, where entry level staff require guided support of graduates in order to understand it.

CPD and training being widely implemented is the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM, 2016) - a Fetac Level 6 course which focuses on the inclusion of all children in the context of equality (see Appendix A). LINC training also at Fetac Level 6, is administered by Better Start - a government mentoring and training body - who also deliver “Hanen and Lamh” training - initiated in 2018 to provide language, communication training and support for practitioners who are engaging with inclusion and disability provision.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Working conditions of the ELC sector.

Many new policies have added to the complexity of service provision. These include the EYEI's (DES, 2016) emphasis on the cruciality of reciprocal relationships and engagement with diverse child and parent groups (DES, 2016, 2018, First Five, 2018-2028), and the need to provide documentary evidence of child learning. *Siolta* (CDCDE, 2006) has also contributed to practitioner work load. A second free pre-school year initiated in 2016 has introduced a much younger cohort (2 years 8 months) to the sector. This was sanctioned without consultation with service providers or advance training to address their complex needs (Oireachtas, 2017, p16). Therefore, responsibilities and roles of practitioners have increased exponentially, potentially increasing expectations, leading to stress, burnout and reducing morale (Totenhagen, et al., 2016). Low morale can also be linked to negative media portrayal depicting child neglect in the sector. (O'Regan, 2012).

At the request of the National Childhood Network and Crann (2018), the consultancy group Mercer proposed remuneration terms within the Early Years Workforce suggesting improvements to conditions and a gradual shift toward qualification-based recruitment over the next five years including “a minimum requirement of a professional degree for new appointments to the role of Early Years Room Leader and higher should be agreed” (Mercer, 2018 p. 6), reflecting government initiatives (Government of Ireland, 2018).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 5

Proposed annual pay scales (Mercer).

Role	IEP Position Class Score	Entry Point €	Mid-Point €	Top of Scale €
Early Years Educator	42 – 43	27,000	35,500	44,000
Early Years Supervisor (Room Leader)	45	32,000	46,000	60,000
Early Years Assistant/Deputy Manager	46	34,000	48,000	62,000
Early Years Manager	48	40,000	54,000	68,000

Note: Reproduced from Mercer Report (National Childhood Network; Crann, 2018, p. 3).

The report continued that as with other public sector roles, staff move up pay scales through a combination of experience, CPD and performance. This would be greatly assisted by a Sectoral Employment Order (See Appendix A) through unionisation of the sector. However, due to the distribution of private and community services indicated in Table 6 (Pobal, 2018, p. 41) this may not be a straightforward process.

Table 6

Percentage of services by organization type and urban/rural distribution

	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18*	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
All services	61%	39%	60%	40%	66%	34%
Private	64%	36%	63%	37%	69%	31%
Community	52%	48%	52%	48%	58%	42%

Note: Reproduced from Pobal (2018, p. 41). Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 – 2018, Dublin.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Clearly, the proposals do not link pay scales to qualifications, as indicated in Table 7 (Pobal, 2018, p. 110) where the influence of remuneration on qualifications is just 10%. Table 5 also indicates that having a Level 9 qualification does not guarantee a leadership role and is not linked to salary. In short, the absence of a wage structure seems to be acting as a CPD deterrent.

Table 7

Staff working directly with children – average hourly wage by job title and highest level of qualification attained.

	NFQ Level 4	NFQ Level 5	NFQ Level 6	NFQ Level 7	NFQ Level 8	NFQ Level 9/10	No early years qualification	Total
Centre manager	€13.50	€13.86	€14.81	€15.07	€15.48	€17.00	€15.43	€14.99
Deputy manager	€17.42	€12.63	€13.33	€14.65	€14.24	€14.31	€12.72	€13.49
Early years assistant (ECCE)	€11.58	€11.30	€11.56	€11.60	€11.63	€11.75	€11.22	€11.43
Early years assistant (non-ECCE)	€10.76	€10.73	€10.98	€11.90	€11.28	€17.60	€11.02	€10.93
Relief	€11.06	€10.58	€10.90	€10.66	€11.32	€8.51	€10.87	€10.77
Room leader (ECCE)	€10.00	€11.69	€12.53	€13.69	€12.94	€13.29	€12.33	€12.79
Room leader (non-ECCE)	€16.15	€11.44	€11.86	€12.33	€12.51	€13.37	€11.87	€11.83
Total	€11.75	€11.21	€12.34	€13.56	€13.09	€14.59	€11.40	€12.17

Note: Reproduced from Pobal (2018, p. 110). Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 – 2018, Dublin.

Chapter 3: Five Contexts for Assessing Professional Development Needs

Although there are several factors that impact on ELC practitioners' engagement with CPD, such as level of qualification received to date, the expectations of the Aistear framework and general working conditions, Molla and Nolan (2018) suggest a framework for analysing CPD needs that engages with the complexity of the ELC sector. Their framework is explored in the following sections, with reference to other empirical studies that focus on dimensions of expertise, responsiveness, recognition, reflection and integrity.

Expertise

According to Molla and Nolan (2018), expertise is defined as the possession of specialised knowledge and skills supported by a body of theory” and arises through the development of formal qualifications” (p. 4). Shulmans (1986) found that practitioners need pedagogical content knowledge (CPK) an understanding of “specific methods, resources and strategies” (p. 78) that are effective within specific content areas. Play based, and Montessori ELC pedagogies represent the highest attended practicums within the Irish pre-school sector, each possessing their own ideologies, posing challenges for CPD providers seeking to address the diversity of learner need.

How adults learn.

According to Vygotsky (1978); Piaget, (1971); Dewey, (1939); Freire, (1927); Ward Parsons et al, (2016) learning that happens actively on site or in-the-moment represents a valuable model where strict training regimes might achieve little and occurs when we integrate thinking, doing and reflecting. Indeed, the classic learning cycle of planning,

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

acting, observing and reflecting remain integral to pedagogical professionalism in early education, (Kohl, 1984; Kohl, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999; Mitchell, 2010; Trodd & Dickerson, 2018) however, where there is a lack of formal or informal CPD, quality suffers as skills are not being adequately addressed (DES, 2018).

While there is no single theory of learning, Kohl, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, (1999) state that each learning stage - experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting - must be engaged with sequentially, incorporating diversity of learner types including reflectors, theorists, activists and pragmatists (Kohl, 1984; Kohl, et al., 1999) see Figure 3 (Learning Cycle) and the Learning Style Questionnaire, (Appendix G). Kohl et al. (1999) did not place great emphasis on reflection, content, context, or address the limitations of constructivist approaches in general such as group speak, and its dependence on a strong core knowledge base (Bergsteiner & Avery, 2014) and while his Learning cycle is a useful tool in the understanding of learner types, strategies, and programmes, it can also be criticised for assuming that educators work in a cultural vacuum.

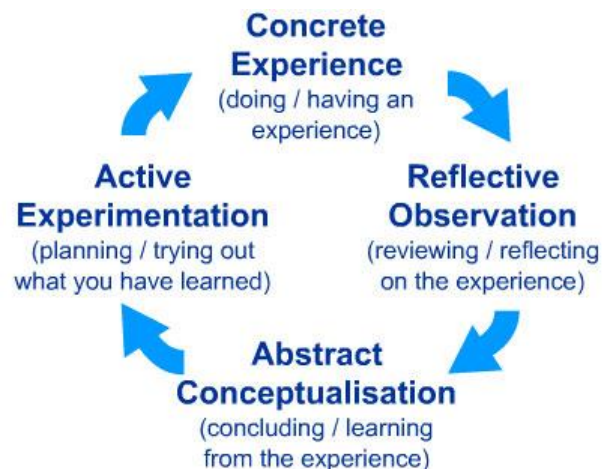


Figure 3. Kohl's Learning Cycle. Reprinted from (Kohl, 1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 1984, Prentice-Hall.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Practitioner contexts – formal and informal learning.

Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006) believed that educators as students work at multiple systemic levels, all of which contribute to levels of practitioner wellbeing and fitness for practice (Price, D; McCallum, F, 2015) including attitudes to and preferences for learning (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Informal preferences often include mentoring. In 2018 Nolan and Molla, took part in mentoring research where Nolan was the principal researcher. They demonstrated that professional learning is “primarily about and for practice” (Nolan et al., p.259) and should be located within the workplace to allow more depth within pedagogical evaluation, facilitating connections between practice and policy – findings that establish parallels with Hayes and O’Neill’s (2019) study in Ireland. Both studies indicated that personal experience, shared values and meaning, and theoretically informed pedagogical content knowledge were important. It is disappointing that in a post mentoring context, neither study examined the change in attributional status of students through on-site achievement and success (Bandura, 1986; Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2014; Nolan et. al., 2018; Hayes et al., 2019) broadening attitudes to more theoretically based formal CPD structures (Wrenn and Wrenn 2009).

As vocational graduate courses support professional learning by moving from practice to theory they make theoretical connections based on experiential learning (CoRe, 2011). However, evaluation of practitioner thoughts, needs, and experiences of formal learning through constructivist methodologies found criticisms in relation to group size, tutor accessibility, group think, assimilation of new knowledge and content knowledge differences (Barnes, Guin, & Allen, 2018; Bergsteiner et al. 2014). Trodd et al. (2018)

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

outline the advantages of formal constructivist methodologies over relational approaches which they believe, do not adequately prepare students for organizational and leadership skills such as “autonomy, agency and self-efficacy” (Trodd et al. 2018, p. 3).

What practitioners want.

Whether formally or informally orientated, in a qualitative study in North Carolina, Barnes et al. (2018) found that practitioners wanted CPD that was “engaging, fun and practical” (p. 127) incorporating assessment practices, curriculum support, teaching strategies and child psychology, which were also reflected in an analysis of CPD needs in EYEI inspection reports (DES 2018 a and b). Systematic professionalisation thus involves the sector engaging in a process of quality improvement (Trodd et al., 2018) by first identifying the CPD needs and preferences of practitioners.

In sum, there is a wide range of ways in which an ELC practitioner might engage in CPD relating to their own personal learning style.

Responsiveness

Pedagogies and parents in ELC.

Molla and Nolan (2018) define responsiveness as the “extent to which educators are able to meet the diverse needs and abilities of children” (p.9) and adults. Indeed, according to the First Five strategy, “interactions are most effective when they are responsive, affectionate, trusting and stable” (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 87) creating balance.

Aistear achieves balance by focusing on the *processes* of learning, in particular, “how” children learn rather than “what” they should learn and is underpinned by a view of

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

the child as an agentic co-constructor of his/her own learning and as partner in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; NCCA, 2009; Hayes, O’Toole, & Halpenny, 2017; Hayes et al. 2017) and perceive children as agentic, dependent and interdependent in an interactive context of intersubjectivity. Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva (2004, p. 713) found that “sustained shared thinking”, curriculum flexibility, integrating child and adult chosen activities and incorporating imaginary play were most conducive to learning and integral to Aistear (2009), however, due to ideological differences and lack of training, some services may struggle to integrate these elements (DES, 2018).

Imaginative play and role play in particular provide children with rich opportunities to learn problem solving and self-regulation skills and are mediums for holistic learning (Aistear, 2009; Hayes et al., 2017) through zones of proximal development and scaffolded mentoring (Vygotsky, 1978). French (2007) maintains that practitioners must support play by planning for it, providing resources and a structure where children and adults act as co-players but where the child has ultimate control while being helped to move from the simple to the complex and where children’s autonomy is supported through exploration of their own interests and talents (Hayes et. al., 2017) and where meaning is shared. Bronfenbrenner believed that such interactive processes in context were essential for development and learning, however, in the absence of Aistear oriented CPD, practitioners may tend to use ideology where the environment is the sole teacher and learning is completely activity based.

Montessori stated in her early writings that play was something of little importance which the child “undertakes for the lack of something better to do”, that it was a “leisure pursuit” and an “idle occupation” (Montessori, 1979 p. 122) maintaining that self-esteem

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

through accomplishment was achieved through real chores or “work” (Lillard, 1973). She believed that the latin term “*imaginari*” “to form a mental picture to oneself” (Werner Andrews, 2013) referred to the intellect not the imagination as the basis of reality and intelligence.

As advocates of the Montessori Method, Lillard et al. (2013) condemn scientific evidence linking almost every psychological and learning characteristic to imaginary play. In defence, Weisberg & Hirsh-Pasek (2013) point out that “without the flowering of play and imagination”, there would be no creativity beyond “what is” (Weisberg & Hirsh-Pasek, 2013, p. 38) . In short, Montessori reflected Piagetian ideology which postulated a reversal of teacher and child roles – “the teacher without a desk, without authority, and almost without teaching” (Montessori, 1979 p. 111) and believed that children develop choice, decision making, concentration, focus and self-regulation through very structured apparatus (Lillard, 2013). This creates challenges for dedicated Montessori practitioners who *must* incorporate concepts such as play, choice, learning contexts, and imagination (Aistear 2009; Siolta, 2006; DES, 2016, 2018a and b) into their pedagogy without the support of inspirational and sustained CPD.

Responsiveness also refers to understanding parents’ role as educators, addressing and responding to individual difference and diversity, their need for involvement and addressing inclusion goals according to “socio-economic status, cultural background and special learning needs” (Molla et al., 2018, p.10). It also involves a respect for childrearing and lifestyle choices, indeed, DES (2016) guidelines emphasise parental involvement in all four key areas of excellence (see Appendix D) while embracing diversity and inclusivity.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In some cultures, educational involvement of parents may be discouraged altogether (Lopez, 2001; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018), leading to a disconnect (Harris et al, 2014) and creating professional dilemmas for practitioners. Share, Kerrins, & Greene (2011) found that some parents did not regard themselves as educators or equal partners with practitioners, continuing that conversely, some cultures place huge emphasis on education, becoming very involved in their child's experience. The First Five initiatives proposal to turn childcare facilities into "parent hubs" (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 128) will attempt to dispel cultural stereotypes (Government of Ireland, 2018) and increase parental involvement, issues that are currently being addressed by the Workforce Strategy in Australia (Molla and Nolan, 2018).

While parental involvement is important, non-involvement is not damaging to child outcomes (Harris et al., 2014). Indeed, according to Berliner (2013) out-of-school factors affect achievement three times more than internal issues (Berliner, 2013). This is reflected in another widespread Irish study by MacKeown, Haase, & Pratschke (2015) who found that low socio-economic group was a factor in low skills of children at preschool entry and exit level, concluding that interventions should commence at birth within family microsystems (Berk, 2009; French, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Indeed, the role of "stage setting" (p. 45), where parents create a home context that influences learning, seems to effect children's academic attitudes more than parental involvement at school (Harris et al, 2014).

Murphy (2015) asserts that the future of Aistear and Síolta depends on informing parents of child outcomes however that is achieved. Consequently, the lens has shifted to a greater focus on the individuality of children's learning through photographic/documentary

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

evidence in portfolio format to be shared periodically (Carr & Lee, 2012). As a result, keeping parents informed is an integral skill and can be improved with targeted CPD.

Recognition

Recognition refers to the perceived status of the role of ELC practitioners which is influenced by past inequalities in carer and educator roles as childcare in Ireland was until recently, divided into two - encompassing a *care* and *educational* perspective, one regulated through the Department of Health, Safety and Welfare, and the other, by the Department of Education (Hayes, 2007) respectively.

“Motherly Love” negative discourse or positive pedagogy?

In attempting to equalise care with education, Hayes (2007) stated that the main obstacle to that goal was the association between care and mothering involving “gentle smiles and warm hugs” (p. 6) which “obscures” the intellectual value of early education and the complex intellectual challenge it entails. She called for an interim ground between play-based services and educational services where learning could be more process orientated - reflecting a cultural perception at the time that play based services were the antitheses of educational settings. Through their attempts to re-conceptualise “care”, Hayes (2007) and Hayes & Kiernan (2012) attempted to incorporate care into “nurturing” as *that* concept “goes far beyond” smiles and hugs (Hayes et al., 2012, p. 64). Similarly, Hayes et al. (2012) protested that in a “care” perspective there is a “minimum of interaction”, the adult “*merely* provides for and looks after the child” concluding that ultimately, the role of

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

care as nurturance within an educative perspective involves “more than *mere* minding” (p. 65).

Moloney (2012) also stated that a mother’s love was not a discourse associated with professionalism as care and education were not ranked equally. This perception persists today, despite reassurance that “a balance of learning and care promotes children’s overall well-being” and that “a curriculum that recognises learning *and* care forms an inseparable whole” (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 87). Lack of societal insight into the ELC sector, ELC roles and the complexity of care as an integral prerequisite for child learning is contributing to low morale, status and remuneration.

Examining the discourse that care and education might be in opposition to each other, and from a feminist perspective, Aslanian (2018) is highly critical of the dropping of the term care from the newest framework for early childhood teaching in Norway. She prefers to expand its definition by describing it as a species activity that includes everything that we do to “maintain and live in our world as well as possible” (p. 3) extending a feeding, hugging and comforting concept towards “nourishing a desire to learn” (p. 4). It may also be that the simplification of “a mother’s love” and role stems from its association with low cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) adding to the perception of ELC as a low status, low skills occupation. Perhaps what is now needed is a deeper reflection and appreciation of the constituents and context of “care” through CPD involving active and watchful engagement (Foucault (1980).

Similarly, in a British study on ELC graduate perceptions, it was found that the dominant discourse regarding care involved associations with low skills, wages, poor recognition of graduate status, and under investment in CPD until recently, when a

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

government initiatives to “professionalise” the workforce was undertaken (Silberfeld & Mitchell, 2018). While the UK Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) is currently considering the inclusion of childcare as a profession, no equivalent body exists in Ireland contributing to status ambiguity even where practitioners have engaged in graduate based professionalisation and change through CPD.

Bioecological model – recognition through change.

Clearly, discourses evolve and devolve through individuals, groups, societies, cultures and time as Bronfenbrenner and Morris theorized. They also believed that development is defined as a “phenomenon of continuity and change” of human beings as individuals and as groups through time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793) continuing that proximal processes or interactions between an organism and environment may hinder or foster development as they are dependent on demand characteristics of the person such as “ability, experience, knowledge, and skills” (p. 796). They recommend that in order for perceptual change or development to occur, specific activities must take place regularly over time and increase in complexity. Exchanges within the context of CPD and networking must include reciprocity and be unidirectional, its objects and symbols imaginative, interesting, and thought provoking (Bronfenbrenner et al. 2006).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

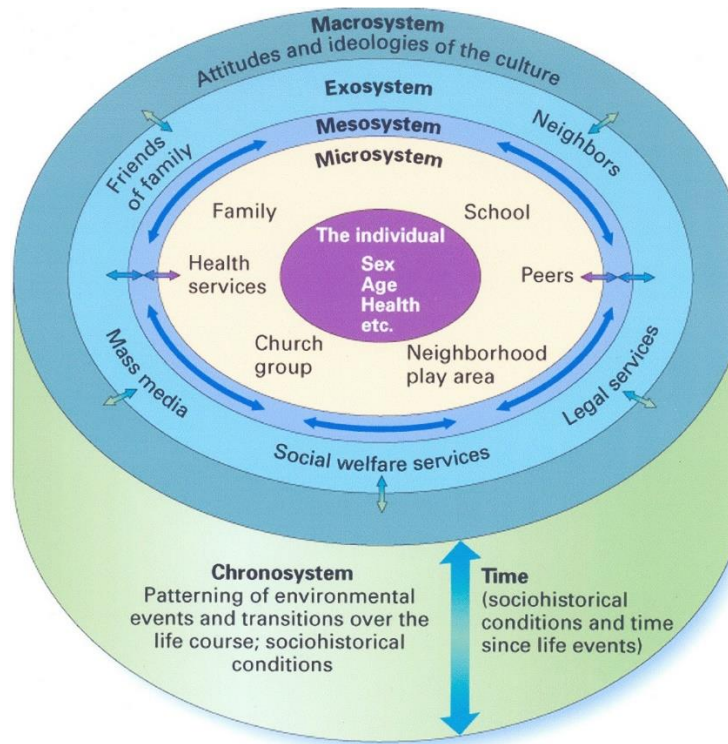


Figure 4: Bioecological model of development

Note: Adapted from Santrock, (2007)

Such are characteristics as reflected in research by Vujicic & Tambolas (2017) who stated that changing cultural perceptions can occur through the professional learning of practitioners described as both an individual process and a systemic undertaking. They continue that achieving recognition can only come from CPD which involves more than mere knowledge transmission, but knowledge that has a transformative effect through the exploration of one's own beliefs, and practices (Vujicic & Tambolas, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the ultimate aim of influencing societal and cultural norms and negativity for the better.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In short, cultural change is needed at policy, perceptual and practitioner level to achieve recognition both within the ELC sector and of the value of play as illustrated through Aistear. However, destruction of negative discourses hidden in the ELC sector may prove difficult due to the complexity of that task within multiple systemic spheres (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2009). Overcoming obstacles to change involves the introduction of levers, incentives, regulations and legislation as well as information and an awareness in relation to choice and action (Knott, Muers, & Aldridge, 2008).

Reflection

Part of Molla and Nolan's (2018) framework, imbedded within EYEI guidelines of DES (2016), permeating through formal and informal learning contexts, representing a major aspect of Kohl's learning theory (Figure 4) and forming the basis of Schon's (1983) theory of reflective practice are skills of reflection.

Skills and abilities.

Schon's (1983) recognised that reflection is a complex process, occurring on action after an event, but also during an event or in action – calling on tacit knowledge to decide on a course of action in the moment. He emphasised that the ability of practitioners to reflect on practice was crucial to their professional development.

According to Dewey (1933 p. 9) reflection refers to thinking about one's beliefs and knowledge with persistence and care, distinguishing between routine and deeply reflective action, while deliberation refers to critically examining theoretical concepts, pedagogical practices and assumptions (Molla and Nolan, 2018). Referred to as epistemic competencies

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(Alexander, 2017) reflection and deliberation skills are defined as spectrums of abilities and knowledge used to solve problems and issues in different contexts as they guide and frame professional practice (European Commission, 2005; CoRe, 2011).

This entails critical-analytic thinking leading to the development of habits of mind and is aligned with corresponding actions (Alexander, 2017). Such skills are integral to documenting and planning curricula, (Síolta, 2006) assessing child learning and planning next steps. Indeed, Aistear (2009) places great importance on processes such as “collecting, reflecting on and using” information (Aistear, 2009, p. 73) to support quality within children’s learning and development. Therefore, reflection has two functions, as a learning tool, and as an instrument to improve practice (Molla et al., 2018) representing a continuous cyclical or spiraling process (Colwell, 2015), requiring monitoring, evaluation and collection of data in relation to the self, children, staff and parent perceptions, actions and emotions.

Difficulties and challenges.

Cherrington (2018) found that ELC practitioners’ concepts of reflective practice were dependent on their pedagogy, finding that within socio cultural approaches, those that were familiar with play based and agentic child centred learning were more intentional in planning, supporting learning and reflection. Those with *entry level* qualifications, who defined play-based learning in relation to social skill development, experienced challenge while integrating child centred and intentional teaching (Cherringwood, 2018) and when positioning themselves as co-constructors of meaning or engaging in reflective practice collectively (Waller & Davis, 2014; Cherringwood, 2018). *Experienced* play based (socio-

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

cultural) practitioners were also found to demonstrate extensive difficulties with reflective practice according to EYEI (DES, 2018) concluding that both entry level and experienced ELC practitioners experience challenge when reflecting regardless of the pedagogical approach due to their inexperience with reflection, the complexity of the skill and the absence of CPD.

Saric et al (2017) also believe that a large gap exists between professed reflection goals and actual reflection activity. They cite challenges including a failure to reflect on context or cultural considerations described by Bronfenbrenner as mediated through our microsystems. Indeed, microsystemic demand characteristics or traits of the person such as emotionality and practicality, or the influence of group dynamics may enhance or inhibit proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2006) of reflective practice. Indeed, Saric et al. (2017) believe that in practice, reflection is poorly understood or engaged with *critically* at a deeply theoretical level therefore, in the absence of targeted CPD, it is expected that practitioners will struggle with this skill.

Kahn, Qualter & Young (2012), believed that our ability to learn reflection skills stems from personal identity which is rooted in our myriad concerns and priorities, cultures and structures which shape and mould action. They identified four categories of reflectors – one of which was referred to as “fractured reflexives”, for whom reflection intensifies distress, prevents action, and is usually associated with limited opportunity to engage in the skill, or with its compulsory imposition. A neuropsychological process of “cognitive load” (Sweller, 1988, p. 266) can also occur during information processing when novice or inexperienced practitioners attempt to reflect on a real time problem but experience confusion or distress. For this reason, reflection is best taught by experienced educators

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

who allow rehearsal of test contexts and concepts prior to exposure to tasks (Saric & Steh, 2017), continuing that ultimately, reflection is best not engaged with if it causes anxiety or stress for practitioners.

Reflection learned with the agency and interest of the learner is often a more successful route within CPD practices, consequently, the Nutbrown report (Nutbrown, 2012) emphasises reflective practice CPD for all ELC professionals, citing a need to foreground reflective and metacognitive in-service training more explicitly at pre and post qualification level. Reflection therefore, represents complex processes needed to impliment pedagogical content knowledge, evidence informed judgement and insights which are essential for weaving theory and practice together (Colwell, 2015). Advantages and disadvantages of reflective practice methods are explored in Table 8 (Tate & Sillis, 2004).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 8

Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Methods of Critical Reflection. Taken from S. Tate and M. Sillis, (2004). The Development of Critical Reflection in the Health Professions – Learning and Teaching Support Network. Centre for Health Sciences and Practice.

METHOD	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Unsupervised		
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not threatening • Can be undertaken according to individual needs • May be able to be more honest • Concentrates on personal issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to challenge self • Have only one world perspective • May become negative • May self deceive
Pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than one world perspective • Can feel supported • Can provide a more objective view of the experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May collude rather than challenge • Need to consider another when engaging in the process
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many world perspectives • Have a support group when initiating action • Can learn from the experiences of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to consider others when engaging in the process • Others needs may be more urgent. • Personal needs may not be the priority for the group. • Need to adhere to ground rules • May be scapegoated • May develop 'cliques'
Supervised		
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be undertaken according to individual needs • May be able to be more honest • Concentrates on personal issues • Can be undertaken according to individual needs • Have the experience of a facilitator (see p 8 & 9) • May be more motivating for supervisee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May respond to please the facilitator • Need to find a personal facilitator • Need to trust and respect the facilitator • May be costly
Pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than one world perspective • Can feel supported • Can provide a more objective view of the experience • Have the experience of a facilitator (see p 8 & 9) • May be more motivating for supervisee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to consider another when engaging in the process • May respond to please the facilitator • Need to find a personal facilitator • Need to trust and respect the facilitator • May be costly
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many world perspectives • Have a support group when initiating action • Can learn from the experiences of others • Have the experience of a facilitator (see p 8 & 9) • Less costly than individual supervision • May be more motivating for supervisee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to adhere to ground rules • May be scapegoated • May develop 'cliques' • Need to consider another when engaging in the process • May respond to please the facilitator • Need to find a personal facilitator • Need to trust and respect the facilitator • Participants may be at different developmental stages • Personal needs may not be the priority for the group.

Note: Reproduced from S. Tate and M. Sillis, (2004). The Development of Critical Reflection in the Health Professions – Learning and Teaching Support Network. Centre for Health Sciences and Practice.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Integrity

Integrity is central to professional behaviour and relates to how staff engage in ethical and respectful actions with children and parents within the micro system of the ELC setting. It involves encouraging reflection, problem solving, and using motivational, and interpersonal skills (CoRe, 2011; DES, 2016) encompassing concepts of justice, and judgement while demonstrating the highest standards of honesty and confidentiality (Molla and Nolan, 2018).

These skills are by no means restricted to leaders but are expected of them. UNESCO defines the leadership role as “a mobilisation of cognitive and practical skills, creative abilities and other psychosocial resources such as attitudes, motivation and values” (OECD, 2005, p. 8). Indeed, Heikka and Halttunen and Waniganayake (2018) describe the role of manager as “leading curriculum work and supporting others to achieve pedagogical improvement” (Heikka et al, 2018 p. 71). They continue that this involves motivating for change and encouraging others to engage in professional development.

While the EYEI (DES, 2018) maintains that all staff can take leadership roles regarding learning and CPD, Nolan et al. (2018) assert that this does not appeal to all workers. Heikka et al. outline that tutor leaders experience challenges where collegial relationships may suffer from lack of trust, consequently, gaining the involvement and co-operation of staff may create difficulties for leadership (Heikka, et al 2018).

Leadership – skills and dispositions.

Bronfenbrenner et al. (2006) cite the difficulties that demand characteristics of the person impose on change, indeed, attempts to understand the complexities of interpersonal

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

and intrapersonal interactions, skills, roles, hierarchies, social, political and cultural elements at play even within small settings may prove challenging for many leaders who are focused on performance (Lindon & Lindon, 2011). When criticising bias in leadership, Ayres-Frkal (2018) unintentionally exposes his own bias by asking why women who communicate and operate in more “feminine” ways are often viewed as weak leaders, while those who handle conflict directly present as “too masculine” risking harsh judgement.

What ever the gender, a leader with a transformational or “change leadership” style understands that change can be intimidating from even the most enthusiastic, and that it occurs through demonstrating expertise, and confidence, by having a sense of humour, having high expectations of staff and demonstrating reflection, deliberation and mentoring abilities (Colwell, 2015).

Power in leadership can cause leaders to focus on outcomes and control in an effort to meet guidelines and targets, creating fear of failure in their workforce. Consequently, workers loose initiative, drive and a willingness to learn (Cable, 2018). However, leading with authority means gaining confidence, trust and influence (Hersh, 2015). Indeed, distributed leadership is co-operative and interdependent, focused on-management, and practice, not people (Denee & Thornton, 2018) and is more conducive to professional learning and staff satisfaction. It requires a skilled leader who can to guide the group through trust, supporting reflection and debate leading to interdependence among staff. However, problems in relation to professional dialogue can occur where workers engage in power struggles (Denee & Thornton, 2018).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Power struggles can be overcome by adopting a humble mindset, and becoming a “servant leader” (Cable, 2018), continuing that this involves having the courage to seek the expertise of others - the knowledge, opinions and beliefs of those who have less power, thus increasing their sense of ownership and self worth. Therefore, as the role of leader is so complex it is understandable that CoRe (2011) recommend professional preparation of placement supervisors through ongoing CPD.

An integral role of leadership is supervision – described as a supportive space and excellent reflexive tool (Soni, 2018) and is what happens when caring professionals meet to assess practice with a view to improving outcomes for children, parents and staff while supporting professional development and incorporating an educative and managerial role (Soni, 2018). Paradoxically, the function of “supervision” is more associated with social work in Ireland even though DES (2016, 2018a and b) guidelines and inspection reports *strongly* criticise services for not overseeing adequate supervision in relation to staff self-evaluation, reflection and review procedures.

Supervision can also be viewed in a supportive and mentoring context. Garvey & Lancaster, (2010) suggest that it should involve a team wide understanding of the term “feedback” (p. 106) with neither positive nor negative associations - eliciting less extreme emotional responses during staff conflict resolution. Indeed, they stress that a particularly difficult word to say is “No” with its perceived threat to collegiality and continue that leaders need to stand up for what is right to avoid negative implications for children and families.

The absence of supervision might be explained by the perspective that leaders who feel unsupported and isolated in their role, prefer to source external mentoring support for

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

staff due to their prior use of disciplinary action in a supervisory context (Soni 2018), however, this may undermine the authority and perceived expertise of the manager. As a result, supervision should not be used as a blunt instrument of admonishment, but as a means of creating equality, of supporting relationships, utilising staff skills and abilities, advocating for change and creating an inclusive setting (Colwell, 2015). In that context, leaders should act with integrity, and promote high standards of vision and direction (DES, 2018). However, conflicts do arise, and dealing with them can create difficulties for the untrained manager.

While noise, light, temperature, and size of work areas can be easily identified as components of a physically healthy workplace, the constitutes of *psychological* well being in the same context are not so well understood. (Shaughnessy & Shepherd, 2018). They outline that developing the communication skills of employees with poor interpersonal relationships will help in conflict situations at a micro systemic level (Bronfenbrenner et al. (2006) as will involving staff in the decision making process.

The ELC sector has undergone several changes in the past number of years, particularly in relation to the implementation of formal accountability, and a play-based curriculum. Key policy documents such as the First Five initiative point to the need for a graduate lead sector to fully engage with quality standards as laid down by EYEI (DES, 2016).

Ultimately, it is within the frames of expertise, responsiveness, recognition, reflection and integrity as explored that learner CPD needs and attitudes will be further identified through practitioner voice.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Philosophical Approach to Data Analysis

Patten (2002) isolated the research question as: “what is the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patten, 2002, p. 168). In order to answer that, it is necessary to seek the authentic “voice” of the “essentialist subject”, a privileged phenomenological method of humanist qualitative inquiry (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 632), continuing that to do this is to suspend conceptualisations, theories and hypotheses so that an understanding of the meaning or lived experience, interpretations and actions can be gained.

An interpretive approach was selected in order to examine the research question: What are the opinions and needs of ELC practitioners’ in relation to continuous professional development (CPD). This interpretive approach regards the social world as ontologically constructivist or in simple terms, acknowledges that reality is not an absolute truth. It perceives that multiple realities occur which are “time and context dependent” (Mertens, 2015 p. 237) and “epistemologically interpretive” (Yarrow, 2006, p. 23). To the forefront of an interpretative inquiry is “meaning making” by the researcher of the researched. Knowledge is thus socially constructed from the conversations, accounts and perspectives of respondents as prompted by the researcher (Mertens, 2015).

As this research entails an analysis of professional practice, it must encompass complexities of meaning within aspects of policy *and* practice, possibly making and supporting causal claims from the data (Mertens, 2015, p. 237) which must be grounded in the subjective experiences of practitioners (Molla and Nolan, 2018). The aim is to problematise the structures and experiences of respondents, the “processes and dynamics”

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(Mertens, 2015, p. 238) within social and cultural contexts that contribute to their meaning systems (Molla and Nolan, 2018) as a way of assessing CPD needs. An interpretivist approach has been used in other studies of practitioners' views in relation to CPD, such as Barnes (2018), Hayes & O'Neill, (2019) and Molla and Nolan (2018) which were deemed most relevant to the current study because they involve real world analysis - make sense of respondents every day experiences and opinions, providing a deeper and richer insight into behaviours, beliefs and motivations using conversation as a key tool.

Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies

This research is viewed through the lens of qualitative methodologies where the researcher is the instrument. Studies that utilise an interpretivist approach usually include qualitative methodologies therefore, it was hoped that qualitative data, and specifically rich individual descriptions of experiences to date of engaging in CPD would help the researcher understand the perceived needs of ELC practitioners.

Qualitative approaches to research describes categories, relationships between categories, and illustrates themes within a plot in order to contribute to our practical knowledge of the subjective experience of respondents within a given context without expecting the delivery of fixed knowledge or absolute truths. According to Patton (2002), qualitative methods are used to achieve analytical depth and can be used to emphasise saturation and transferability aspiring to be practical and truthful. Consequently, the process of the analysis of variables and their inter relationships is complex, difficult to predict, and must not be prejudged (Agee, 2009; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Meares, 2015). In qualitative enquiry there is no formula or theory, nevertheless, qualitative inquiry

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

requires complex strategies and procedures as it does not stand or speak for itself through mathematics (Meares, 2015).

In an example of qualitative style, Barnes et al. (2018) conducted qualitative research using 3 focus groups to assess CPD training needs, using semi structured interviews and guided questioning to share thoughts and experiences through interactive conversations which were “digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim” (Barnes et al. 2018, p. 116). Data was analysed using an inductive approach, described by Patten (2002) as “immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes and interrelationships” (p. 41) continuing that the researchers must establish credibility, transferability and confirmability by engaging in peer debriefing, multiple respondent perspectives, rich description and respondents’ own words within established theoretical constructs. Therefore, Barnes et al.’s philosophical and methodological lens represents a good fit - justifying a qualitative approach to the present research.

Molla and Nolan’s (2018) qualitative study represents a research methodology that is also immediately useful for the purposes of this study. They extracted a conceptual framework from the term “professionalism” by examining the subjective meaning from the lived experiences and voices of practitioners by conducting semi-structured interviews while using a philosophical lens that was “ontologically constructivist and epistemologically orientated” (Molla et al., 2018, p. 2). The questions and themes for this particular interview schedule will arise from the literature review.

Some aspects of quantitative data collection were included in the present study to allow the participants to reflect on their own learning style and to establish how this might impact on their engagement with CPD. Smeyers believed that typically, the purpose of

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

quantitative research is to discover the distribution of variables within a deductive normative format (Smeyers, 2008) and is used to achieve breadth of understanding, indicating generalisability (Patton, 2002). By combining these approaches, the researcher sought to overcome the limitations of any one approach, and to gain a clearer picture of how qualitative and quantitative approaches can work together to create a richer and more systematic approach to data generation. Hayes et. al.'s (2019) study combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches when they complete a three-month Aistear-in-Action (2013) type CPD mentoring programme at an urban area of disadvantage. They attempted to support "a thorough and detailed understanding of Aistear's principles, themes and guidelines" (p. 68), using mixed method reflection techniques, photographic and video evidence within cluster groups to support critical examination of practice and the development of action plans. Questionnaires using quantitative (Likert Scales) and qualitative (open ended) methods were analysed, to explore practitioner "open voice" (Newby, 2015, p. 289).

Open-ended questionnaires were not used in the present study due to potential issues in relation to practitioner written language and expressiveness capabilities in the context of low socio-economic group, low educational attainment, or where English is not a first language (Newby, 2015). Indeed, Hayes et al. maintained in her study that it was unclear from practitioner written accounts and questionnaires as to their depth of understanding regarding Aistear themes in practice stating that practitioners were found to be "much stronger in conversations when compared to written evidence" (Hayes et al., 2019, p. 76). Therefore, to create an atmosphere conducive to respondent comfort and

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

disclosure, and so respondents have more control of the flow, direction and depth of information, a conversational method or semi-structured interview technique was used.

Hayes felt that practitioner answers sometimes overlapped and intersected (Hayes et al., 2019). While Likert scales do not provide depth or richness of respondent lived experience, they can provide added depth to the research question (Mertens, 2015). Closed Questionnaires also provide numerical data that may assist the researcher to address the research question with complexity and validity. A closed questionnaire will be used for the purposes of this research to ascertain respondent learner type using a Learner Style Questionnaire (Kohl et al. 2005-6).

Building on research by Molla and Nolan (2018) in which they asked “What constitutes valued and valuable beings and doings (what we are and what we do) in the ECEC sector in relation to professionalism” (Molla and Nolan, 2018, p. 2) this research continues that task by asking respondents about their opinions in relation to professionalism thereby ascertaining their CPD needs within five variables of professional practice (Molla and Nolan, 2018).

Overall, some amendments and additions were made to the design used by Molla and Nolan (2018) in order to focus on pertinent issues of professionalisation for contemporary ELC practitioners as identified in the literature review e.g. within the category of *expertise*, respondents were asked about their experience within the Aistear Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) and Síolta (CDCDE, 2006) the Quality Standards Framework, whether they needed CPD in either or both and what type was preferred.

Respondents were asked about *recognition* - how the ELC sector and ELC practitioners are viewed in relation to status and about the relationship between care and

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

education (Hayes, 2007; Murphy, 2012; Hayes & Kiernan, 2012; Cherringwood 2018; Government of Ireland, 2018) and about their opinion regarding the need for graduates in ELC.

In relation to *reflection*, respondents were asked if CPD in reflective practice was a need in light of recommendations in CoRe (2011) for training and CPD. Preferred type was also explored.

Respondents were asked if they felt they needed CPD in relation to child and parent *responsiveness* strategies and interactions based on research in relation to the Montessori Method, Aistear, Síolta, DES reports and First Five recommendations, and were asked about their opinion and interest in relation to new initiatives such as parent hubs (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 129) and regarding the type of CPD needed in that context.

Respondents were asked about the term *integrity*, whether it is relevant to ELC professionalism, whether management and leadership CPD is needed and if so, their preferred type.

Data Collection and Analysis

Ten Respondents were purposefully selected from a list of ELC services located on a Dublin City and County Child Care Committee (CCCC) website. They are government funded centres of administration, development and support for the ELC sector.

Once a description was given over the phone, the consenting respondents requested and were sent an email giving more detail of the study, including the Interview Guide (Appendix E) and Kohl's Learning Style Questionnaire (Kohl et al. 2005-6) located in

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Appendix G. It was believed that giving this information in advance would help respondents to decide whether to participate or not, would avoid respondent fatigue and allow time to process thoughts. Meetings were then arranged by email.

Seven respondents were interviewed at their services and three were interviewed by phone to convenience the respondents. This occurred over a three-week period, between 12th April and the 1st May. Conversations lasted for an average of 40 minutes each. They were recorded with respondent's permission, and later transcribed by the researcher as, according to Braum and Clarke, (2006) doing so improves researcher absorption of the data.

Transcripts were then divided according to frames of professionalism including expertise, reflection, responsiveness, recognition, and integrity (Molla and Nolan, 2018) and themes, codes, similarities and differences isolated by colour matching comments that reoccurred between transcripts. They were then divided according to practitioner pedagogical type (Montessori or Play based) and a comparative analysis was then performed on the data.

Sampling

From the outset, the researcher observed simple guidelines and rules governing sampling plans which stemmed from the research and conceptual framework in the hope that it would generate a thorough database on the participant attitudes and needs, and would allow the possibility of drawing clear inferences and explanations from the data. It was important that the sample should be ethical, feasible, transferable, efficient and practical (Kember, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This study reflects sampling techniques used in the following example where purposeful sampling was used to test attitudes to on line CPD. Barnes, Guin & Allen (2018) used a maximum variation sampling technique to represent diverse philosophies and roles of a focus group within Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in North Carolina, evaluating practitioner thoughts, needs and experiences. Purposeful sampling strategies were used in this study to sample for heterogeneity and to examine the degree of variation or diversity within a sector (Palinkas, et al., 2016) which Patton (2002) maintains is useful when rich sources of information are needed and where respondents are willing to articulate experiences in a knowledgeable and reflective way (Patton, 2002, Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Patton (2002 p. 240) further explains that “the purpose of a stratified purposeful sample is to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core”, but states that the latter may also emerge in the analysis. While the consensus on probability sampling is mixed with many rejecting the limiting nature of such approaches, Palinkas et al. continue that the justification for selecting a knowledgeable sample purposefully is supported by practitioner links with the aims of the research (Palinkas, et al., 2016). Consequently, services were purposfully selected based on participation in Montessori and Play based services.

Selection and Recruitment of Participants

The criteria for selecting the pedagogical approaches for the study was due to their dominance on the pre-school landscape as indicated in the Pobal (2018) census (see Table 1) with the fundamental pedagogical differences between Montessori and play based

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

services being socio-constructivist/cognitivist as opposed to the socio-constructivist/ socio-cultural leanings of Play based settings.

Ten potential respondents were purposefully selected from a list of ELC services contained on a Dublin City and County Childcare Committee website which contains a comprehensive and up to date list of all ELC services in Dublin and the greater Dublin area. Potential respondents were contacted by phone initially to ascertain their interest in the study. Some potential respondents requested to see more detail prior to consenting. It was at that stage that some declined to participate due to time constraints or the perceived complexity of the study.

The consenting respondents requested and were sent an email (Appendix F) giving an outline of the study, Kohl's Learning Style Questionnaire (Kohl et al. 2005-6) and the Interview Guide (Appendix E). It was believed that giving this information in advance would avoid respondent fatigue and allow time to process thoughts. A meeting was then arranged by email at the respondents' convenience. Seven respondents chose to be interviewed at their services and three expressed a preference to be interviewed by phone due to childcare commitments See Table 9 and 10 and 11.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 9

Biography of Respondents

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Montessori Services</i>
1	Manager: Montessori sessional service, Level 8. (DEIS Area).
2	Manager: Crèche and Pre-school. Former Secondary School Teacher, ELC Level 9 (No Montessori Training).
3	Manager: Montessori sessional service, Level 8.
4	Manager: Montessori (Incorporating Play). Crèche and Pre-school. ELC Level 8. (No Montessori training).
10	Manager: Montessori sessional service, Level 8.
 <i>Play-Based Services</i>	
5	Manager: Play based sessional service, ELC Level 8.
6	Manager: Play based sessional service, Retired Primary School Teacher, Level 8.
7	Manager: Play based sessional service, ELC Level 6.
8	Manager: Play based crèche and preschool, ELC Level 8.
9	Manager: Play based crèche and preschool, ELC Level 8.

Note: ELC – Early Learning and Care.

ECCE Sessional service opening hours: 9.15am – 12.15pm (2.8yrs to 5.6 years), 38 weeks/year.
Crèche or Day Care Service opening hours: 7.30am – 6.30pm (Babies to 5 years), 50 weeks/year.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 10

Description of respondents including area type, ratios and age cohort

Resp. Num	Qual.	Role	Pedagogy	Area type	Adult:Child	Age
1	Level 8	Manager	Montessori	DEIS	4:40	2.8 - 5
2	Level 9	Manager	Montessori	Standard	23:65	0 - 5
3	Level 8	Manager	Montessori	Standard	17:100	2.8 - 5
4	Level 7	Manager	Montessori	Standard	6:42	2.8 - 5
5	Level 8	Manager	Play	Standard	4:30	2.8 - 5
6	Level 8	Manager	Play	Standard	3:22	2.8 - 5
7	Level 6	Manager	Play	Standard	2:22	2.8 - 5
8	Level 8	Manager	Play	Standard	13:60	0 - 5
9	Level 7	Manager	Play	Standard	14:64	0 - 5
10	Level 8	Manager	Montessori	Standard	12:1	2.8 - 5

Note: Numbers 2, and 4 are both a Montessori preschool and crèche services and Numbers 8 and 9 are Play based pre-school and crèche services (large chain). Numbers 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 10 are sessional (9.15 – 12.15pm) play based only services.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 11

Time Line of Contacts

Resp. Number	Date contacted by phone	Date
1	4 th April	12 th April
2	4 th April	15 th April
3	13 th April	16 th April
4	13 th April	17 th April
5	16 th April	18 th April
6	23 rd April	25 th April
7	4 th April	25 th April (phone)
8	23 rd April	25 th April
9	16 th April	29 th April (phone)
10	29 th April	1 st May (phone)

Note: Time line of interviews of ten ELC practitioners between 4th April and 1st May 2019.

Conversations lasted for an average of 40 minutes each. They were recorded with respondent's permission, and later transcribed by the researcher as according to Braum and Clarke (2006) as doing so improves researcher absorption of the data.

Texts were then divided according to frames of professionalism including expertise, reflection, responsiveness, recognition, and integrity (Molla and Nolan, 2018) and themes, codes, similarities and differences isolated by colour matching comments that reoccurred between transcripts. They were then divided according to practitioner pedagogical type (Montessori or Play based service) and a comparative analysis was then performed on the data.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Informed Consent

All respondents were given the opportunity to view the Consent Forms (Appendix B) interview schedule (Appendix E), the and Learner Style Questionnaire (Appendix G) for at least two days prior to the interview. On commencement of the interview, the researcher outlined that once the “housekeeping” or details of the study had been explained, respondents could read the consent form and could sign it if they wanted to participate. All respondents indicated that they were happy to continue and were then given time to read and sign the consent forms.

The interviews conducted by phone proceeded in the same manner, where respondents had printed copies of the consent form, Learner Style Questionnaire and interview schedule with them. Once the study was explained, and they had read the consent forms they indicated that they had signed them. All respondents were informed in relation to the location of the data, and their ability to withdraw consent to use their information at any time. All respondents were assured of their confidentiality and that their data would not be used for any purpose other than the present research. Confidentiality was also assured by numbering each respondents’ transcript, the data from which they were informed, would be stored on the researcher’s personal laptop which is password protected and inaccessible to the public.

Ethical considerations were also communicated to respondents through the informed consent form (Appendix B) which all respondents were required to read and indicate their understanding of prior to signing. This indicated that they understood confidentiality and anonymity issues, that their own names or the names of their services would not be identified, that they could withdraw their permission to participate at any time,

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

and that they understood the purpose of the research. Respondents were reassured that the research was designed to empower, support and promote their issues for positive effect.

Instrument

Semi-structured interviews.

In the semi structured interview, themes according to Molla and Nolan's (2018) framework in relation to the term 'professional' within an ELC context were used to ask questions of respondents according to topics in the literature review, reflecting perspectives on expertise, recognition, responsiveness, reflection and integrity. Open ended questions were used in order to allow respondents freedom to answer the questions with breadth and depth, to gauge respondents attitude to the topics and to understand their perspectives in relation to preferred CPD type. Respondents were also asked if they would like to raise other issues or comment on their own perspectives and ideas in relation to CPD at the end of the interviews. The schedule of questions from the semi structured interviews are contained in Appendix E.

Learner style questionnaire.

Kohl et al. (1999) Learner Style Questionnaire was also used in order to ascertain whether parallels would be drawn between learner style and preferred CPD. In all cases, the result of the questionnaire co-incided with respondents preferred CPD type. Some respondents were surprised at its accuracy (see Table 12).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Interview Schedule – Categories From The Literature.

- Respondents were asked to reflect on **expertise** which is linked to professionalism involving formal and informal learning, and in the context of Aistear and Siolta. It evaluated respondent motivation to engage in CPD and be appropriately trained and credentialled, exploring practitioner preferred CPD.
- Respondents were asked to reflect on CPD in relation to **responsiveness** incorporating the extent to which educators have or intend to incorporate new perspectives and pedagogies in order to meet the diverse needs and abilities of children and adults.
- Respondents were asked to reflect on **recognition** which refers to the extent to which they place value in and are valued for their professional work. The concept of “care” and how CPD effects the perception of status and professional identity within the ELC sector was also examined.
- Respondents were asked to comment on their observations in relation to **reflection** - their beliefs and skills, practices and assumptions. Needs within CPD were then explored.
- Respondents were asked to reflect on **integrity** and leadership and their need to engage in CPD in the context of ethical and respectful actions including motivating, problem solving and supervision.

Respondents were asked if they would like to raise any other issues that they deemed important in relation to CPD needs and wants.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pilot

Piloting a research study prior to entry into the “field” is prudent, under appreciated and under discussed, and is an invaluable guide to the subjective information gathering process of respondents (Lehnerer, 1996, Sampson, 2004; Gudmundsdottir & Brock-Utne, 2010) also helping to support adherence to an “epistemological and ontological stance” (Sampson, 2004, p. 385; Molla and Nolan, 2018, p. 2). Gudmundsdottir et al. (2010) believe they help to increase validity and reliability within the research methodology.

Getting the opportunity to try out the design of the study on a participant prior to the actual study was used to give advanced warning where certain questions might be ambiguous or unclear. It was feared that having two different research methodologies – an interview schedule and a questionnaire - might confuse respondents, however, this was not evident. Indeed, it was noticed that the respondent liked to answer questions at length leading to a long (1hour 15 minutes) but very interesting interview.

One of the main advantages of conducting the pilot interview, was researcher confidence which increased during the pilot. The respondent filled in the questionnaire prior to the interview as requested and commented on its accuracy. While the pilot interview was long, it was decided not to delete any questions due to the richness of the data. The pilot introduced an additional question in relation to accredited COD in management and leadership due to a deficit in Montessori training and also linked the lack of recognised professional status of the sector to ambiguity around title (practitioner, educator or teacher). The pilot study transcript was then analysed for errors, bias, ambiguity and validity, two questions were added to the schedule in relation to leadership training and status (title).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In short, the pilot interview provided researcher confidence in relation to the practicalities and methodology of the study, and the feasibility and logistics of conducting two methodologies – qualitative and quantitative simultaneously and was conducted to correct for anything that might compromise the integrity of the study.

Questioning Methodology

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were used as data generating tools, posing a series of questions based on Molla and Nolan's (2019) framework and on the literature review within a semi-structured context to respondents in ELC settings regarding their attitudes and perceptions in relation to CPD. No real changes were made to the schedule through out the interviews. During the interviews one participant looked for clarification in relation to the term 'integrity' which was explained using the general terms of another respondent so as not to bias the answer.

Bias

If a respondent asked for clarification in relation to a question, great care was taken to rephrase it without introducing bias in an attempt to retaining its open character. The researcher participated in the conversation by simply reflected back what respondents had just said, asking for more detail on certain issues, and for clarification on others. This allowed participation in the conversation without distracting respondents in their answering. Analysis of data generated from respondents included exact extracts of practitioner voice (Newby, 2015).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Challenges and Limitations

Recruitment of ten participants proved to be a difficult task. Sending respondents the questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide in advance risked non participation which frequently occurred. Some cancelled, changed their mind after being given a day to think about it. In addition, it was very difficult to find play based services as Montessori services are much more prevalent in the Dublin area. Two of the managers in Montessori settings did not have a Montessori qualification with the Association of Montessori teachers of Ireland (AMI), something that only came to light during the course of the interview, consequently like may not be compared with like. Length of time to type transcripts was also totally underestimated, taking four hours per transcript. Finally, using all five aspects of Molla and Nolans (2018) framework meant that the focus of the present study was broad, any one of the topics could have also been isolated for a deeper focus.

Researcher Positionality and Ethical Concerns

I have worked as an owner/manager of a private play based pre-school service for fifteen years, and found the transition to Aistear (2009) and Síolta (CDCDE, 2006) to be challenging due to the almost total absence of associated CPD since its inception. However, through using the Aistear (NCCA 2009) Manual, the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (NCCA, 2016) and online resources, I achieved four excellent grades within all four categories (see Appendix D) in a DES inspection in 2016. Consequently, I must state that while I believe a play based approach is essential to child wholistic development and learning, I will endeavour to be as objective as possible and adhere to the literature as indicated during the course of this study.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I believe that ethical principles of integrity, motivation, compassion and honesty are centrally important in work and life. As a person who has engaged for many years in CPD, and a firm believer in life long learning, it is realistic to believe that this will also influence my perspectives. In my enthusiasm, I know I can rely on structures and insights emanating from the research process to bring objectivity and clarity to the fore. Ultimately, it is my belief that this research will deepen my understanding of the complexity of professionalisation within the sector, enhancing theoretical perspectives on CPD and learning as outlined.

I did not allow power to emerge as a factor to cause offence to respondents or to impede the validity of the research (Mertens, 2015). I listened, acknowledged, and created space for respondents as equals with respect for their integrity and dignity as co-researchers keeping in mind that relationships that are exploitative, disrespectful or co-ercive are totally unethical.

According to Lather & St. Pierre (2013) conducting qualitative research involves engagement with a problem - the minusca of which we are not aware of initially. Disconnecting myself from the assemblage of themes and codes posed a challenge, having never completed this type of research before, however, I attempted to bring clarity to the incoherent, do justice to the respondents accounts, interpreting their accounts as accurately as possible.

While I am aware that my reading of the research could be influenced by personal subjectivities, I will consciously try to free myself from all pre conceptions and ideologies as I explore old connections and find new links.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition, I am clear that the knowledge I gain is not my own, therefore, in a spirit of reciprocity and collaboration, Respondents will be invited to share in the research process at any stage, and to use the results for their own purpose when completed .

Conclusion

In sum, a philosophical humanist and interpretivist approach was used within qualitative and quantitative mixed methods, chosen because of their combined efficacy in seeking out the opinion and lived experiences of participants together with an objective assessment of their learning style.

The research instruments contained both qualitative and quantitative elements in the form of a semi structured interviews and a questionnaire on learner styles used to establish the presence or absence of links to CPD preference. Using mixed methodologies of quantitative and qualitative inquiry mirrors the study by Hayes et al. (2019) who used semi-structured interviews and a Likert scale to judge respondent engagement with Aistear however due to limitations indicated by Hayes et. al, (2019) instead of a Likert scale, this research used a Questionnaire. Purposive sampling was used to access participants within two pedagogical groups – Montessori and play based who represent the most attended pedagogies on the Irish ELC landscape.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of the Chapter

The views shared by the Montessori and play based participants in the semi-structured interviews in relation to continuous professional development as well as their own experiences of working the ELC sector, provide rich data for analysis in this chapter. First an overview of the coding used in this research will be outlined. Then the selection of themes that emerged are discussed, namely:

- Learning styles and CPD methods
- Attitudes to change
- Challenges and opportunities in responding to parents and children
- Acknowledging those who care and those who value care
- Challenges of reflection
- Developing leadership skills

Some of these had previously been outlined in the literature discussed in Chapter 2 but respondents in this study also raised the following issues: governments role in improvement of status, staff wellbeing and market forces. Play based and Montessori groups (each with five respondents) will be *compared* and *contrasted* to ascertain any *differences* in relation to experience, needs, opinions, and perspectives in relation to Continuous Professional Development. Coding will follow thematic analysis guidelines of Braun & Clarke, (2006) in an attempt to do justice to the complexity of qualitative research.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Interpretative Analysis - Coding

Respondent testimonies will be mined for meaning by isolating codes and recombining them into new themes in order to ascertain the similarities and differences between the Montessori and Play based groups in relation to CPD.

Respondents recordings took approximately four hours per transcript. This was long and laborious, necessitating frequent stops and starts. Two booklets were created each containing five respondents transcripts with one booklet for the Monessori and another for the Play based group. Patterns in the data sets were colour coded, (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using highlighter pens in a form of “thematic decomposition analysis” e.g. references to CPD were given an orange colour, care - a pink colour, leadership - a yellow colour and challenges - a green colour etc, until all the data was highlighted in a process referred to as “thematic discourse analysis” (Braun et al., 2006, p. 8). Codes were treated objectively - each regarded as potentially important. Codes were then combined and new themes developed.

In this way the data analysis moved from a descriptive to a latent analytical context where both groups were compared and contrasted using an ‘essentialist/realist approach, (Braun & Clarke, 2006) but which also sought to understand the respondents within a socio-cultural context. The whole process was enormously iterative, moving over and back between data sets in order to find patterns and parallels - the interpretative task helped enormously by the initial labourous transcribing process as it improved familiarity with content. Themes that were similar were combined, and themes that were different or stood out were given a particular focus. Issues of interest were explored with reasons given as to why that seemed so (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While some themes reflected Molla and

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nolan's (2018) frames the ultimate point of the study was to examine *CPD need* which is necessarily conceptually related. The following analysis is an illustration of themes designed to convince the reader of the integrity of the respondents accounts.

To outline briefly, themes in relation to a disconnect between actual and desired CPD type emerged with fear of change and lack of time as strong subthemes. Care, education and status became very apparent themes with government role also emerging as a subtheme. Themes in relation to the challenge of reflection and complexity of leadership also predominated.

Learning Style and Preferred CPD Methods

Introduction

This theme can be likened to Molla and Nolan's (2018) topic of Expertise which reflects respondent self knowledge in relation to learning style, and their preferred CPD type. As will be recalled, respondents initially undertook a Learning Style Questionnaire as part of the study, however additionally, it was apparent that respondents evidenced a high level of self awareness in relation to their learning style.

Respondents were interested in the outcomes of the Learning Style Questionnaire (Kohl & Chapman, 2005-6) with most emerging as theorists and pragmatists (see Table 10). They mostly favoured experiential and theoretically based CPD, however, their learning styles were therefore *not* conducive to the current types of CPD provided nationally, which are mostly theoretically orientated with little or no experiential elements.

They also described their learning styles in various ways such as "kinesthetic and visual" (respondent. 2). Respondent 1 was: "an old fashioned learner", continuing that

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

“learning by webinar, any learning on the internet freaks me out”. Respondent 10 confessed to having: “very bad auditory processing skills” and while respondent 5 described herself as a “visual learner”, respondent 6 stated: “I would be extremely practical... wouldn’t be theoretical at all, not books, or reading up, reading up, reading up”. In fact, most Montessori and play based respondents favoured experiential and theoretically based learning, reflecting Vygotsky, Dewey, Ward Parsons and Kohl who believed that integrating thinking doing and reflecting, represented the best medium through which to learn. Table 12 illustrates respondent Learner Style and CPD preference.

Table 12

Learner Style (Kohl & Chapman, 2005-6) result and CPD preference

Respondent	Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist	CPD Preference
1	6	16	13	12	Mentoring
2	5	16	14	11	Mentoring/Theory
3	4	14	15	15	Mentoring
4	5	11	11	9	Theory/Workshop
5	2	14	15	15	Mentoring
6	4	16	10	13	Mentoring
7	8	16	15	17	Mentoring
8	4	15	17	12	Theory
9	6	13	6	3	Theory
10	4	14	17	12	Workshop

Note: Learner Style results of ten respondents and their CPD preference.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most respondents except respondent 10 favoured mentoring, reflecting research by Nolan and Molla, (2018) and Hayes & O’Neill (2019) that stated that learning is “primarily about and for practice” (p. 259) and should be located in the workplace. Respondent 2’s CPD philosophy was “that the theory needs to be lighter, the practical needs to be heavier” parallels for which reside in research by Nolan et al. (2018) who stated that experience and theoretically informed pedagogical content knowledge are important elements of CPD. Respondent 1 favoured informal short workshop type CPD but Respondents 1, 3 and 8 opted to continue with formal education (management training) reflecting Trodd et al. (2018) who stated that formal methodologies are superior to relational approaches to learning as they are more efficient in imparting skills such as independence and self reliance. Respondent 4 stated a preference for in-service training. While enthusiastic about CPD, Respondents 3, 4 and 7 indicated that they were not inclined to engage in unpaid, out of hours training.

Respondents Attitude to Change – Aistear and Síolta

Introduction

This theme also comes from expertise (Molla and Nolan, 2018) and looks at respondents needs and experience of Aistear and Síolta.

While learning styles and preferred CPD appeared to be idiosyncratic and linked to individual traits, engagement with Aistear and Síolta appeared to be influenced by the setting in which the practitioner worked and the training they had received. Two managers did not possess Montessori qualifications, (2 and 4) but were recent ELC graduates and had personally engaged in a programme of extensive in-house mentoring in an effort to

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

integrate Aistear and Síolta at their settings as: “it feeds in fantastically with Montessori” (respondent 4). Both experienced difficulties in relation to how staff viewed the framework and standards, describing the process as: “terrifying, terrifying for staff” (Respondent 4) particularly in relation to curriculum reflection and planning stating: “they very much liked their strict kind of curriculum plans etc, etc, and changes, didn’t like change”. Respondent 4 finally achieved a compromise, calling the result: “Montessori/Play-based” which involved one hour of “ECCE play time” per three hour Montessori session to include *toys* – a process that took “two years to impliment”. Respondent 2 sought the assistance of extensive Better Start mentoring, also describing the process as a “difficult transition” while maintaining absolute loyalty to the Montessori Method.

As a Montessori teacher, respondent 1 felt that Aistear blended very well with Montessori and described both as practical and based on real life. She stated that children with additional needs at her DEIS preschool were not always drawn to the Montessori equipment which is interesting as Montessori originally created the apparatus for children with additional needs, achieving great success. However, respondent 1, having “tried to make” the children use the apparatus, acquiesced, becoming orientated towards play at the children’s insistence:

We found that a lot of children maybe had...are not as attracted to the Montessori equipment, so we tried, kind of, before it became really strong with Aistear, we brought in various things, so we would have a really nice home corner, a really nice book corner, we changed that up to be a really nice dark den, or kinda soothing things. (Respondent 1).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In parallel with Bronfenbrenner et al (2006) who found that difficulties in demand characteristics of the person influenced attitude to change, respondent 1 opined that change would be helped or hindered by personality, continuing that her colleagues would be more averse to it than she was. She described their perception of the inspection process as a criticism of their expertise: “Some people take it as a massive insult, that it’s a slight on Montessori” continuing:

Because we were trained to be quite exacting, em, but then to allow this freedom within limits, its down to individual personality, and if you are very rigid, you could say - yourself as a person - ”oh, well in the Montessori, he can only do this if he can do that”, which is the way it is proscribed. (Respondent 1).

As dedicated Montessori practitioners, Respondents 3 and 10 said they were happy with their level of knowledge of Aistear and Síolta , however, while Respondent 3 had incorporated Síolta into his setting, he regarded the reflection time involved in learning journals to be a distraction from working directly with children, and referred to the journals as a place to keep “fancy photographs”. Respondent 10 indicated a sense of helplessness thus:

Gosh, I’m nearly 30 years teaching now and the last few years, as a lot of people my age would agree, its gone very confusing, because, we were all set in our ways in teaching, and I would have always used methods of record keeping, and now

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

there is this whole new way, and it does seem to keep changing a bit, and I certainly am finding it very difficult to keep on top of everything. (Respondent 10).

Certainly, older practitioners may need additional support to facilitate change through mentoring and hands on CPD from immediate effect and prior to inspection. Understably, she indicated a need for CPD in Stress prevention and mindfulness.

Two managers from play based cresse services, respondents 8 and 9 were former Montessori practitioners who “converted” (respondent 9) to Play based ELC degrees and are now managers in former Montessori (play based) settings incorporating Aistear and Síolta. Respondent 9 explains:

It was very structured, like, the way we *were* taught it in college, as opposed to when I started to do my degree three years ago which was very play based, it kind of changed my view of how children were allowed to explore the toys and experience their imagination and creativity. (Respondent 9).

She now conducts in-house Aistear training with staff within a collaborative and interactive methodology and understands that team atmosphere, motivation, deliberation and reflection (Colwell, 2015) are integral to good leadership. Respondents 6 and 7 found the transition to Aistear to be seamless: “I absolutely think it’s fabulous, I absolutely think it’s great, that’s the way I have been doing things for years on end, going on what you want to do and not sitting down and do this because you have to”. (Respondent 6).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All practitioners except respondents 4 and 8 did not see the value of Síolta or understand its content saying it was un-necessary and a repeat of Aistear. Respondent 7 voiced her frustration thus: “Like for instance, with regard to the observations, what a mess, that’s a mess, what a total mess, does *anybody* know what they actually *want*? I’m just *trying* to understand how *bad* it actually is”. She reflected on the situation with her ELC colleagues thus: “We will say, ‘it’s not worth my while’, some have closed, as they have said, ‘I can’t be bothered, I’ll go work in an office...then I’ll be on more money with less pressure’. (Respondent 7).

Clearly, issues exist in each group with both Aistear and Síolta , with the concept of ‘play’ and the presence of ‘toys’ (play equipment) differentiating Montessori and Play based groups.

In sum, individual differences such as their learning style can impact on a practitioner’s preferred type of CPD. The influence of education and training is obvious too, with Montessori trained practitioners in the main expressing challenges in implementing aspects of Aistear. At present, training in Aistear and Síolta are regarded as benchmarks in a practitioners CPD but how these sessions are delivered, and the participants learning background may need to be given more consideration.

Challenges and Opportunities in Responding to Parents and Children

Introduction

This theme resembles Molla and Nolan’s (2018) responsiveness category relating to how practitioners engage with parents and children.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Practitioners noted the complexity of their roles in responding not only to the needs of children in their care, but also in working in partnership with parents. Montessori and play based services all expressed the belief that parental involvement in their child's education was important but remained low due to parent and practitioner time constraints. Respondent 4 replied that parents were the most important role model in a child's life: "I do believe they are the expert of their child...we are looking to you, you are the guide, we may be the professionals, but you are the ultimate experts" reflecting MacKeown et al. (2015) and Berk (2009) who found interventions for children must begin at home from birth – also referred to as "stage setting" (Hayes et al, 2014).

When asked if parental lack of responsiveness at ELC settings effects child learning, respondent 7 believed that psychologically, children can feel unsupported if a parent is absent during invited activities - "you could see how it effected their whole demeanour, whole sense of wellbeing". This goes against research that found no ill effects of parental non involvement on child outcomes.

Parental involvement is important according to the EYEI, DES (2016) therefore, due to time constraints on parents, responsiveness to parents regarding child experience comes in Portfolios and Learning journal format - containing photographic evidence of Aistear goals and aims and requiring high standards of practitioner reflection and expertise: "they get a learning journal sent to them every week, every Friday, for the week in advance, so they know, you know, where the girls have said where the interest has come from and they will see their own child's name".(Respondent 2).

Respondents from both groups expressed an interest in the "Parent Hub" concept, (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 128) a proposed co-expert information initiative. Having

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

just completed LINC training, respondent 4 stated that it was an excellent CPD match and that she would be interested in the new role. Most insisted it be a “PAID” undertaking, however interestingly, Respondent 2 absolutely refused to engage with the idea stating:

We are already a hub of support for parents....can we *really* take on a hub of support for parents in implementing *your* new plan? I mean, *you* are taking all ownership of all of *our jobs* and just telling *us* what you want *us* to *do*?

(Respondent 2).

Perhaps her frustration is illustrative of the complexity and logistics of practitioner roles within services that are already stretched to the limit in providing a professional service to parents while maintaining a viable business model.

Respondent 8 said that due to quick hand overs in the evening and morning, parents don't get time to voice concerns, especially with complex behavioural issues such as biting. She felt she needed CPD in relation to child psychology, communication and assertiveness would be invaluable - “if you don't have the confidence, you won't do it, but we really push the staff, and we want them to be able to talk to the parents about things” (Respondent 8).

She believed that staff would prefer formal methodologies but where the tutor “keeps a bit of laughter, and isn't like, strict”. This reflects research by Barnes et al. (2018) who found that practitioners mainly wanted CPD that was “engaging, fun and practical” incorporating curriculum support, teaching strategies and child psychology.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

While generally supportive of the idea of engaging parents, practitioners expressed the view that parents are not a homogenous group. Guidelines for excellence and professionalism in relation to diverse groups are defined in Sólta (2006) and in Aistear's (2009) theme - Identity and Belonging (see Area 1, Appendix D). However, research by Lopez, (2001) and Hornby & Blackwell, (2018) describes a sense of alienation and subordination parents experience due to cultural dictats discouraging educational involvement. This is reflected in comments by respondent 6:

“...but I can think of two that maybe out of shyness, not become involved, because they are foreign ‘nationals’, but when I have them in to talk about the little fella at the beginning of the year, like, they really, Oh, my God, they were really on board (Respondent 6).

Indeed practitioners expressed the perception that in many cultures, parents are very ambitious for their children - “I think definitely, we would have a lot of Indian families, and they really push for education, so they are like, they want them nearly reading going to school” (Respondent 1). Parental involvement was also associated with socio cultural group “I have worked in two other schools where parents were quite posh and parents were quite demanding, but parents here are more on an even keel” (Respondent 1).

While no differences in parental interaction were detected between groups - ELC practitioners could avail of CPD to achieve expertise in reflective practice within written/oral communication processes particularly in the light of DES (2018) empirical

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

findings (see Appendix D, Area 3) illustrating that more support is needed in engaging with such a diverse profile of parents.

As indicated - Molla and Nolan (2018) define responsiveness as the extent to which practitioners also meet the needs of children. Reflecting that, professional practice and excellence is defined as a sense of well being that children experience during play and learning through which they acquire skills, positive learning dispositions and choice (Aistear, NCCA, 2009; Síolta 2006; DES, 2016; Government of Ireland, 2018) also (Appendix A, Child Care Act, 1991, 2006, 2016, and Appendix D, Area 3).

All respondents wholeheartedly believed in the value of play in children's learning even though it has been referred to as an "idle occupation" by Montessori (1979 p. 122) preferring a "work" ethic. Respondent 3 stated that the children themselves "think they are actually playing". This was an interesting observation due to the prescriptive nature of their activities.

Respondent 10 believed in the value of play within certain confines:

Children learn through play, everything they do, is learning through play. In the Montessori classroom, they would be learning through play all the time, I wouldn't necessarily have all of the (pause) this is where I clash with the Aistear and Síolta, the play would be a lot of things (pause) like the sand pit and building and construction...but I have it in the garden.

(Respondent 10).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition, she believed that choice is extremely important, and is accommodated within limits: “They wouldn’t be allowed to choose something that they haven’t been shown”. Choice was similarly described by Respondent 3, however, total freedom of choice was permitted for “one hour on Friday’s” when “toys” were provided – “they really love it”. Montessori herself viewed the intellect, not the imagination as the basis of reality and intelligence (Werner Andrews, 2013) which is still an interesting debate as according to many theorists it is through both the imagination *and* the intellect that we learn.

Respondent 1 and 4 introduced role play to their Montessori rooms reflecting research by French (2007) who believed that by providing resources for children, acting as co-players and facilitating role play children learn creativity and life skills. Respondent 4 enthused: “but everyone is coming on board, they can see the benefits, but its slow, and hard to get your head around, especially if you like order”.

Respondent 6 described imagination through play as: “HUGE, oh no, it’s HUGE for me, the most important thing for them” continuing that she received great inspiration from her tutors:

...so I have small world outdoors, but then they said ‘you can have them indoors, just have little containers’, have the sand’, and I did a whole learning presentation on them building a small world... going out, collecting stones, pine cones, bringing them back in, developing their own small world, the learning was *phenomenal*, the *days* they spent doing it, the *engagement*, the *involvement*.

It subsequently became a fairy world where children made up their own stories which were recorded and made into books for parents, reflecting Aistear principles that

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

scaffolded play allows children to experience creativity and imagination both outside and inside the classroom (NCCA, 2009; DES, 2016).

Respondents 8 and 9 described how Montessori apparatus are now used as play equipment at their former Montessori settings, - “we still have things like the pink tower or the insects for drawing and things like that, but the children would build whatever they want with them”. Respondent 9 now describes her philosophy in terms responsiveness as integral to the “agentic” child, and the emergent curriculum – “it would be children’s choice, and it would be interest boards, so we get everyone together, and find out what they are interested in, and depending on what it might be, it might be that activities are done around that”. (Respondent 9).

While responsiveness to parents display no distinct differences between groups, differences have been identified between Montessori and Play based respondents responsiveness to children.

Recognising and Respecting Those Who Care and Those Who Value Care

“We love the children and we love the job, but the recognition is nothing, non-existent”. (Respondent 7)

Introduction

This theme relates to recognition (Molla and Nolan 2018), or the perceived status ELC practitioners experience from a personal and societal perspective and looks at the dichotomy between education and care.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Both Montessori and Play based respondents stated that they felt respected within their own settings, however, outside of the workplace, recognition of their status sank dramatically as there was no understanding of their level of expertise: “I mean, we have nice, respectful relationships with the people here... but an awful lot of parents, in the public, I think they think we are there, just here to mind their children”. (Respondent 1). Negative stereotypes linked to the ELC sector may come from media portrayal where children were subjected to neglect (O'Regan, 2012).

While Hayes (2007) and Moloney (2012) felt that care associations obstructed the professionalism and status of ELC workers, respondent 9 felt that only graduates should work with very young children: “because I don't think that people that are applying for jobs in baby rooms realise how much of an impact they have on a baby”.

Respondent 2 felt that care wins out over education every time:

There was a woman giving a talk on Saturday - hers was: – ‘I'm going to refer to us as teachers, because education has to be valued and education doesn't start at five or six, it starts at zero with us’, and I said, yes, absolutely, but I hate the fact that there's no care in that... because care always wins (Respondent 2).

(Early Childhood Ireland, First Five Master Class, 12th April)

While Aslanian (2018) extends care to incorporate “nourishing a desire to learn” (p. 4), respondent 1 expands the term further *again* by describing the imperative of communicating with compassion on an emotional or “feelings” level with children with additional needs – continuing: “it doesn't matter, you know, their learning ability, if you

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

took all that away, this is a little human being in front of you”. When asked about her associations with the word “care”, respondent 1 told the story of a little girl who, having received a lot of support from her, finally settled in school:

When one day, the mother asked: ‘so, have you children of your own?’ and it was a really direct question, and I was really blindsided by it, and I don’t have children of my own, and she said: “OOh, I was sure you did, coz you are sooooo good with them”. That was the ‘mothers love’ thing! It was so funny because the mother thought that you could only be *that* caring if you were a mother, and I was thinking, no, as a human being you *can* be that caring. (Respondent 1).

While Hayes (2007) believes that the term care is almost the poor relation of ELC, respondents in this study have demonstrated that one can be integral to the other. However, reflecting Hayes, (2012) and Murphy (2012) respondent 7 stated that care was *not* her focus:

Well it really irritates the *heck* out of me because I have parents handing children over, saying: ‘well, you know, he will have to be changed several times this morning’. I’m a *sessional* service. I’m *not* a child minder. I’m *not* a crèche. (Respondent 7).

In the same vein, respondent 3 stated that: “one of the Montessori principles would be “do not do for the child what the child can do for themselves” continuing “we are educators, NOT carers” but qualified that by saying “you still have to have a caring side”.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In sum, while differences in perspectives exist, it is essential that practitioners reconceptualise care terms and roles through engagement with CPD, with a focus on celebrating and exploring the dimensions of what that is and what it does or its “beings and doings” (Molla and Nolan, 2018, p. 3) regardless of child age.

Expertise and status.

Due to their expertise, it was felt by all except Respondent 4 (who referred to herself as an “educarer”) that regardless of graduate status, all ELC workers deserved to be called “teacher”. However, respondent 6 opined: “I do think that *pre-school* teacher doesn’t have the same status as *primary school* teacher because there aren’t enough of preschool practitioners qualified at graduate level”.

When asked if achieving expertise as a graduate would influence the status and recognition of ELC practitioners, most respondents argued that experience was very important: “You don’t need a degree to be good with children, so that’s not to say you might have a staff member who has a level five or six that’s not as capable than someone that has a degree”. (Respondent 3). This reflected the sentiments of almost all respondents who regarded experiential and content pedagogical knowledge as though they were one and the same. However, according to respondent 5, Level 5 was far too basic an entry point stating that she found the professionalism and expertise of graduates to be “absolutely superb, superb” -

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Government role in recognition.

Respondent 4 reflected the sentiments of all respondents when she said that she felt overwhelmed by additional responsibilities and changes foisted on the sector without consultation and little recognition:

We are expected to make all these changes, CPD, take on children who are two years eight months now, babies without training, and take on children who have Special Educational Needs, disabilities, and now there's AIM 7, but everything is done without looking at the focus of the childcare practitioner. (Respondent 4).

She stated that going on strike was not an option out of loyalty to vulnerable parents and children.

When asked what would enhance recognition, all respondents said that improvements to pay and conditions including paid CPD would greatly increase status which they believed, was the responsibility of Government:

It comes from the top, parents and the general public will believe us then, so it has to be official recognition, as a pay scale, they pay primary schools over the Summer, why don't we get paid over the Summer? Are we not good enough to be paid a decent wage? We work really hard. (Respondent 7).

Indeed, a new Workforce Development Plan is predicted to emerge from the First Five strategy which will make a "concerted effort to raise the status of and value placed on

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

the ELC workforce” (p. 111) through improvement in working conditions including funding for CPD.

Market forces - Montessori and Play based services.

“I think that Montessori, at the moment, will always win”

(Respondent 9).

Many Play-based services believed that parents had more respect and recognition for Montessori than Play based pedagogies and (prior to the ECCE scheme, 2009) paid a much higher fee, possibly owing to it being a very established pedagogy. While Aistear is underpinned by extensive theoretical principles and research, it is only ten years old this year and is relatively unknown outside of the sector. Even where it is incorporated into play-based settings, they are still regarded primarily within a ‘care’ perspective. Respondents within both groups expressed the opinion that parents “had a skimmed knowledge” (Respondent 3) and were almost completely unaware of the basis of both pedagogies, but due to loyalty - often chose Montessori:

But I think the education at the moment, the education part of what we do isn’t there, (sic) it is seen by a lot of people as, “oh, they are just playing”, or a lot of people would hold a lot of recognition for Montessori practitioners... lots of parents say “oh, we are taking them out of the Play based and putting them into Montessori” thinking *they* are going to do more than what *we* are doing.

(Respondent 9).

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Both of respondent 7's staff are recent ELC graduates, engaging in a child centred and emergent pedagogy which, she believes, largely appears to go un-noticed by parents:

There isn't enough recognition for the teaching side of it, and I have tried so much to tell the parents on their own or in groups - I send whatsapp app's to parents, emails, information sheets put together myself explaining what we do, why we do it. (To parents) '*Play? you think play is nothing? No...it's very important*'.

(Responder 7).

This phenomenon reflects the necessity of parental involvement in child settings where expert and objective ELC professionals support parents (where needed), to make informed choices.

Historical and negative associations between care and low status persist, despite the presence of graduates in the ELC sector, while Governments role in funding CPD and better conditions were distinctly mentioned as pivotal to status improvement.

The Challenge of Reflection in the Absence of CPD

Introduction

This theme is related to reflection (Molla and Nolan, 2018) and entails reflecting on practice and experiences as a core part of continually improving it. While the participants in this study, through their reported learning styles, showed a willingness to reflect, they also perceived a lack of space in ELC structures in which to engage in such reflection.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Graduate managers in both groups found reflective practice a challenge to teach as respondent 8 explains:

“I think staff do struggle to self-reflect on, about how their day went, and I think it comes back to *my* training, and I have up-skilled so much and have seen it, and appreciate it as a skill much more than someone else”

(Respondent 8).

She believed that the problem lies with skills of “abstraction” continuing “I think it’s something that should be workshopped and something we should be trained in”. This is reflected by Respondent 4 who believed that incorporating Aistear, Síolta and Reflection training within workshop type CPD was an urgent need due to time constraints of staff, an issue that was echoed by most respondents. She admitted that while using the “Aistear Síolta Practice Guide” (NCCA, 2016) a self-reflective learning tool - her staff continued to struggle with its content without graduate level training or support.

Context, culture and time.

The First Five report (Government of Ireland, 2018, p. 110) acknowledges that there are “limited opportunities for observation, reflection and planning” in the ELC sector yet this is a central requirement of the EYEI (DES, 2016). Working in a DEIS area provided a challenge for Respondent 1 and her staff who stated that while the Learning Style Questionnaire (Kohl & Chapman, 2005-6) indicated her orientation as a “reflector”, she did not have time to engage in the practice due to having high numbers of children with

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

emotional and behavioural needs and inadequate AIM support: “So we are so caught up in the present moment and trying to get the minimum required paperwork done, that we - the reflective journal, we have forgotten about”. She continues that she has time to engage in reflection mainly while tidying up after sessions and states that due to staff issues, reflective practice has become a challenge:

...so, we try to, if time allows, ad hoc, where you bounce off ideas, kind of - is there anything coming up in your room that you are stuck on? that they are not dealing with?, something? have you any idea on that? But then you have to be careful if you have more than one classroom that it doesn't become a competition.

(Respondent 1).

She illustrates a typical conversation thus: “Look, I'm not telling you you have to do this, I'm just making suggestions...its only to be a help, it's not forced”. As an insight, research by Kahn et al., (2012) illustrates that attitudes to learning are embedded within our abilities and personal identity, which in turn are influenced by multiple factors which may help or hinder us as learners. They outline the category of “fractured reflexives” (p. 865) who find reflection distressing, experiencing a cognitive load, and preventing them from designing positive actions or outcomes. In a performance context, this can be a major source of occupational stress preventing further engagement.

Respondent 1 cited staff need for CPD in which they could - “actually have those conversations comfortably, without it being a ‘me’ thing, an argument or a competition”. She discussed the possibility that CPD within a fictional case study format might work,

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

offering staff a neutral, supported and pressure free space to discuss and reflect. Her own need for management training was also strongly articulated.

Reflection that works.

Providing opportunities for assisted dialogic reflection between colleagues are described by Kahn et al. (2012) as “striking” in their ability to teach reflective skills such as “negotiation, contestation and problematization” (p. 867). Nolan and Molla (2018) emphasised that among prerequisites for collaborative learning and reflection were collegiality, objectivity, and dispositions toward change, reflected by Tate & Sillis, (2004) in Table 7. They stated that “ground rules” “trust” and “respect” must exist for the reflection process to achieve success.

All but three respondents reported challenges with imparting reflective practice techniques however, while respondents might profess expertise, Saric et al (2017) point to the possibility that actual practices may not indicate reflection activity. However, respondent 9 was positive, acknowledging the value of Aistear and Síolta training, even using Schön’s (1983) reflection in and on action techniques.

Respondent 5 enthused about reflection skills gained initially through transformative CPD within Fetac Level six training: “...this is because of the Level six, this tutor made us completely understand it and get it and so we brought it in, it was really helpful doing it with other colleagues, bringing it back to our setting”. She was subsequently inspired to continue to tertiary education where reflection skills were also a focus:-

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

So (in college) they do practice reflective practice, they do it an awful lot, there is actually a whole module going through three years...so that has been phenomenal, we do reflective practice about the year, the module, other modules, it has been FANTASTIC!. (Respondent 5).

Identifying as a theorist and pragmatist in her learning style, unusually, respondent 5 benefited from a balance between experiential and theoretical CPD at third level, - proving that transformative CPD and guided expertise can improve student adaptive attributional beliefs (Bandura, 1986; Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2014; Nolan et. al., 2018; Hayes et al., 2019). She continued that while her CPD experience was “revelatory”, her colleagues who simultaneously undertook an equivalent course online – were not as inspired: “and we were really teasing it out and explaining it to them, and we were quite amazed that we were doing the same course, and yet, they did not understand the art of reflection”. This points to a lack of engagement experienced by students within online formats (see research) but also possibly a lack of quality standardization within CPD learning methodologies.

Respondent 3 said that reflective practice has always been an aspect of the Montessori method: “that’s something, as part of the Montessori curriculum, was that, you were constantly looking at why something was happening and what can we do”, continuing that engagement with the Montessori apparatus would be closely monitored and assessed through careful reflection on the next learning steps:

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

...but you would look at where a child is, and say for argument sake, the child has mastered the number rods, then you bring symbols into the number rods and you can bring in the spindle box, so you are sort of observing where the child is.

(Respondent 3).

He did not see the value of further training admitting that neither he nor his staff get time to engage in reflection anyway: “it’s trying to find the time, because staff finish when the children go home, they have their own commitments afterwards, so it is like, where do you get the time”?

In an example of *child* reflection, and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) in action, Respondent 8 described a parent demonstration and its relevance to both the agentic child and the emergent curriculum such that the children themselves began to reflect on and direct their own learning but also – to ask their own questions (DES. 2016, Appendix D Area 3) -

Mum (sic) came in with her stethoscope and her jacket and they loved it, and then it went on a second week and we were talking about the ambulance, and the children were questioning, saying ‘where do the pets go’? ‘who are *their* doctors’? so all of a sudden, we just completely changed onto pets. There is so much of a flow to learning now. (Respondent 8).

In short, reflection is *integral* to Siolta (CDCDE) and Aistear (2009) and a contractual requirement of DES, (2016). It can be transformational in facilitating change on a micro, macro and meso systemic level (Bronfenbrenner, 2016), however, it is not

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

surprising that many ELC respondents experience difficulties in practice as it is a complex skill (CoRe, 2011) requiring time, motivation and a balance of experiential and content pedagogical knowledge. However, systemic issues were reported by respondents including conflict situations in reflective contexts where they experienced stress, anxiety and discomfort due to a lack of appropriate CPD. This no doubt, has consequence for children and families.

Developing Leadership Skills for The ELC Setting

Introduction

A core part of the ELC practitioner's work was perceived by respondents in this group as their interactions with fellow staff. Described by Molla and Nolan (2018) as central to professional behaviour, integrity is concerned with how managers and staff relate and respond to each other in a respectful and ethical manner. Having defined integrity, this section will look at how it is incorporated into leadership and management. Respondents experience of evaluation and review procedures will then be explored to establish CPD need.

Respondents from both groups expressed similar perspectives, defining integrity as having a "a moral compass" (Respondent 6). Each group spoke of an awareness of equality and justice and a belief that integrity could be recognised through methods of responsiveness to parents, children and staff - being respectful, sharing expertise, celebrating difference and through motivating, guiding, encouraging, and inspiring. Respondent 1 thought it was a: "naturally occurring thing", evolving from: "values, and

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ideas of right and wrong” and was encapsulated by Respondent 7 as: “a mixture of instinct, experience and personality”.

The work of a manager in these settings has the added dimension of being a leader and necessarily guiding the work of other colleagues, supporting their wellbeing and providing targeted training where necessary. Heikka et al., (2018) described the role of manager as leading educative work and supporting pedagogical improvement including dealing with difficulties. Several managers in both groups have undertaken a substantial educative role, leading change however, they described the process as “challenging” (Respondent 1) “difficult” (Respondent 2), “terrible” (Respondent 4) and “chaos” (Respondent 6).

Respondent reasons for difficulties experienced related to the fact that change is stressful, requires time, commitment, motivation, is dependent on demand characteristics of the person (Bronfenbrenner et. al., 2006), attributional beliefs, fears, and values. Openness to change also depends on how it is managed (Heikka et al, 2018).

Having been given in house training, Respondent 8 believed strongly in an open-door policy to mediate change involving support but also encouraging staff initiative: “So I like to be seen on the floor as much as I can during the day” continuing: “I’ll give advice when needed but I also want them to figure it out for themselves”. She felt that it wasn’t enough to simply manage - leadership was about “having a vision” (Respondent 8).

Respondent 5’s style of leadership was humble yet strongly democratic:

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For me we are a team, I work with them in a very democratic way so that we all share things, or ideas, and we try to implement everybody's ideas, so that everybody feels part of the service, and everybody feels valued, and no one is spoken down to, and no one is treated any differently to anyone else. (Respondent 5).

Respondent 2 was quite military in her choice of leadership terms and felt strongly about portraying an authoritative style in order to engender confidence and trust in her workforce: "Well, you can't be at the same level as your staff, because *you're* a manager, *you* are a leader... if you were (on the same terms) then you wouldn't be a leader. You *have* to be a role model, you *have* to lead from the front". She described being "down in the *trenches*" with the rest of the staff and working her way up, continuing that leadership and integrity: "come from the *helm*". She acknowledged that with her guidance, her staff have worked hard to develop professionalism and expertise through mentoring and CPD remarking : "I think sometimes they don't give themselves enough credit for how far they have come, but that's our job, you know?".

When asked if it is possible to teach leadership there was a mixed response: respondent 9 felt that tuition would increase awareness: "I think that you can be more aware of being a good listener or a good communicator, if they are things you struggle with, but I think a leader, I don't think leadership can be taught". She continued: "but you really need to be someone who is likable anyway". Respondent 1 did not think objectivity could be taught, having tried to put her point across and failed: "you might be trying to get them to understand - well you say - I'm just going to give up, because that is that persons way of thinking".

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Staff wellbeing.

Leadership also entails building positive working relations amongst staff and managing conflict. According to Soni, in the absence of formal or informal leadership training, dealing with staff conflict can be difficult for both management and staff, and is more likely to be avoided (Soni, 2018). Several Respondents (1, 4 6 and 8) cited motivational and communication difficulties within staff interactions which they believed, correlated with a lack of leadership CPD and training. Respondent 8 described her role as peace envoy: “there’s being fair, but then, you have to be practical as well...you have to make that decision, you are not going to have everyone happy at the end of the day”.

Having integrity can thus also be recognised as making difficult decisions while risking unpopularity and damaging collegiality:

one person is telling me one thing, the other person is telling me something completely different, and then, at the end of the day, I have to come to my conclusion. I have to be like ‘oh, this is learning for everybody’, and that might not be the answer that they want.

(Respondent 8).

Supervision - skills and structures.

Respondents 2 and 8 used supervision as part of a strong leadership strategy thus adhering to guidelines (Stolta, 2006; DES 2016) – the rest of the cohort of respondents stating that there simply wasn’t enough time to have formal meetings: “I think they are

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

absolutely brilliant, and to be honest, we should be doing more of them... but everything is so difficult in a ratio situation”. (Respondent 4). Respondent 3 stated: “We do a self-appraisal form for all of the staff, but I don’t think we got any of them back yet”.

As an illustration of expertise and efficiency, respondent 8 outlined supervision procedures at her multi location service thus: “So, you have your three month, another six month and yearly appraisals, there’s a nine month one in your first year as well”. She states that staff thus feel supported and secure in their role where difficulties are addressed as they arise. Respondent 5 illustrates the daily process further:

“...it’s how did your day go? Were there any issues? What can we do to help? What can we do to support it? Have you any ideas? Do you want to go and think about it? We will reflect on it and come back tomorrow and see what we can do. (Respondent 5).

CPD in management training – leading with integrity.

Respondents 4, 5 and 8 received formal leadership tuition as part of their ELC degree but only Respondent 5 was impressed as her courses had an additional experiential element: “it was soooo good to make you really think about the differences in leadership and how it can change the dynamics of the staff and how it can produce negative or positive results”. Respondent 9 wanted to formalise her in house training: “obviously I have built up management skills here, but I always thought I would like an actual business management course”. Respondent 3 outlined: “I was thinking about a managerial course, because never mind trying to deal with revenue, taxation, wages, you know there is a whole

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

minefield there, and then employees...”. Respondent 4 expressed a desire for training such that it could involve shadowing a manager to learn skills experientially.

Respondent 2 described that she had acquired self-funded CPD as short and informal management training within law, leadership, and communication strategies stating that they should be more widely available: “Unfortunately, we have had to go through private firms to get that training” because with local CCC’s and child-care oriented training companies “there’s never an awful lot that’s management centred”. She said she loved the practical approach of IBEC, because they: “talk about work place relations committees, the law, from finding out the learning style of your staff to finding out what’s gonna work better for communication”. Ultimately, she asked of the policy makers (out there) if in future, there could be more variety and practicality in the content and delivery of CPD - “A little bit of support for management would be great, and not just SíOLTA, SíOLTA, SíOLTA, OK?” (Respondent 2).

Effective leadership involves having integrity, judgement, compassion, and mental agility to navigate through the complexity of human behaviour throughout the life span. Leadership for change will be the most important role in ELC in the coming years, and while there is *still* no CPD available to managers to assist with this task, respondents need it and want it.

In sum, respondents identified the fact that they did not have enough time to engage with CPD, with financial barriers preventing staff from engaging in un paid, out of hours training also acknowledged in the First Five report. While all respondents had engaged in further

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

training, most spoke of an apathy in relation to CPD as theoretically dense and of craving an experiential element which is not widely available.

Some intragroup variance was obvious with practitioners in Montessori settings being more likely to report an academic perspective favoured by parents possibly emanating from a care and education dichotomy in contemporary ELC in Ireland. Molla and Nolan's (2018) categories proved very useful for focusing a lens on the complexity of CPD need but perhaps unique to the Montessori group is their perception that they are already experts. Consequently, CPD structures and delivery have to be robust enough to capture the complexity of needs in the *entire* sector going forward.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

“The First Five ten-year strategy (Government of Ireland, 2018) proposes to develop the compliance framework and financial guidelines to underpin public funding in ELC and school-age childcare, with an agreed mechanism to withdraw funding from settings that do not meet contractual requirements (quality or otherwise)”. P. 170.

Therefore, engagement with CPD is vitally important for the viability of all services.

Molla and Nolan’s Framework was instrumental in identifying categories of CPD need, the complexity of which cannot be underestimated. This study found that there is no one method through which we learn, Kohl, (1984) describing learning as a process of reflecting, planning, acting, and observing. Through the learning style questionnaire and respondents own metacognitive observations, they reflected that their preference for CPD entailed a combined theoretical and experiential approach, reflecting research by Trodd & Dickerson, (2018) who believed that combining both formal and informal CPD was most conducive to retention of skills and knowledge. Due to the the generic nature and structure of CPD provision presently, practitioners thus reported a mismatch between their own perceived needs and the content of courses and while they displayed a willingness to engage in CPD generally, many had mixed feelings about future CPD as their opinion to date was that it was theoretically top heavy needing an element of fun and practitioner involvement. Short courses and inservice training were described as being potentially an excellent medium to transmit knowledge if mixed methods were used while also bringing learner style into the equation especially for Siolta and Aistear training.

There were no differences between how each group interacted with parents, with most respondents citing a need for communication and assertiveness training especially in

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

light of proposals to develop ‘parent hubs’. Differences in interactions with children were evident however, between the Montessori and Play based group - Montessori respondents stating that they did not want any further CPD having already attended Aistear and Siolta workshops.

While all managers experienced difficulties with staff in relation to implementing Aistear and Siolta standards even where Aistear and Siolta CPD had been undertaken, two non Montessori managers in Montessori settings felt that much still needed to be done to help Montessori teachers to meet DES (2016) standards in a practical way, due to the presence of strongly held ideological beliefs. Indeed, out of respect to Montessori teachers, it *is* still only a *proposal* that Aistear become statutory (Government of Ireland, 2018). All managers cited a need for CPD in management and reflective practice CPD in the interest of child and practitioner wellbeing.

Within group difference was evident among Montessori and play based groups with respect to care and education with some respondents stating that care was not their main focus, while others felt it was integral to their role and as such - should be reflected experientially in all CPD programmes. This dichotomy was found to exert a negative influence on the status of respondents and their staff, a lack of funding and time also creating a disincentive to engage in further training.

Recommendations

A well-educated workforce is essential to the professionalisation of the sector, (DES, 2018; First Five, 2018) therefore, diverse learner preferences, types and abilities

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

must be accommodated in any CPD strategy. Assessment of learner style could increase CPD uptake and success leading to a more practitioner driven system.

A concerted effort must be made to create a brand “Aistear” commencing immediately on this its tenth birthday. This must involve a strong promotional and marketing strategy directed at parents which will bring visibility to Aistear similar to the profile created for the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS, 2019) for school aged children. Communication, inclusion and assertiveness CPD was cited as a need in order to facilitate better interactions with parents.

Respondents cited a lack of time and financial incentives preventing them from participating in formal or informal CPD. Improving conditions at policy level, particularly, expanding the availability of third level grants to part time students, and creating inservice and modularised CPD linked to remuneration will make training more accessible and attractive. Third Level ELC courses should be standardised to incorporate an experiential and participatory element with an organised and substantial work experience programmes. Informal or short workshop CPD should also make practitioner participation a major focus.

Practical play oriented and accredited CPD in and of itself with a focus on contemporary research must also be promoted in parallel with Aistear in all settings. Practitioners experiencing difficulties should be helped to face the challenge of change (Bronfenbrenner et. al, 2006) with the support of trained mentors and tutors. Country wide use of self assessment tools such as the proposed new Síolta Practice Manual (GoI, 2018) and Aistear Síolta Practice Guide (NCCA, 2016) will greatly embellish Montessori and play based pedagogies in a neutral non confrontational manner. CPD must include

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

leadership and ‘supervision’ training for ELC graduates to engender adherence to contractual requirements and guidelines and in the interest of staff and child well being.

The sector needs not only to be graduate *lead* with level 7 and 8 as entry level qualifications, but graduate *driven*. All trainees and entry level staff should be supported by graduate leaders (as tutors) through structured inhouse mentoring and training programmes, increasing their attributional self belief systems, with a view to third level participation. However, in the drive to professionalise, a balance must be maintained between care and education. Therefore, the construct of care must be re-evaluated with more complex structures and performance assessments so that it can be formally recognised. This would help to develop a culture of CPD and would improve the profile of the sector throughout society.

Future research could shine a brighter light on the experiences and perceptions of Montessori teachers in relation to the process of change within an qualitative and action research or focus group format.

In summary, respondents feel that much is expected of the ELC sector having been turned into a multi-purpose “one-size-fits-all” panacea. Indeed, expecting the ELC sector to engage with substantial formal and transformative CPD and to become graduate lead without major funding and incentives, regulations, legislation, and information (Knott, Muers & Aldridge, 2008) would be naive and disingenuous to the entire ELC sector in all its complexity.

Bibliography

- Agee, J. (2009). Developing Qualitative Research Questions: a Reflective Process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), 431-447.
- Alexander, P. (2017). Reflection and Reflexivity in Practice Versus in Theory: Challenges of Conceptualization, Complexity and Competence. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(4), 307-314. doi:10.1080/00461520.2017.1350181
- Aslanian, T. K. (2018). Remove 'Care' and Stir: Modernising Early Childhood Teacher Education in Norway. *Journal of Education Policy*, 3(33), 1-18. doi:10.1080/02680939
- Ayres-Frkal, R. (2018). Care and Critical Reflection in Women's Leadership Development Programs. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 2(2), 35 - 39.
- Bandura, A. (1970). *Principles of Behaviour Modification*,. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundation of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Barnes, J. K., Guin, A., & Allen, K. (2018). Training Needs and Online Learning Preferences of early Childhood Professionals. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 39(2), 114-130.
- Bergsteiner, H., & Avery, G. (2014). The Twin-Cycle Experiential Learning Model: Reconceptualising Kolb's Theory. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 36(3), 257-274.
- Berk, L. E. (2009). *Child Development, Eight Edition*. New York: Pearson.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Berliner, D. C. (2013). Effects of Inequality and Poverty vs. Teachers and Schooling on America's Youth. *Teachers College Record*, 1-26. Retrieved April 4, 2019, from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org>

Bleach, J. (2014). Developing Professionalism Through Reflective Practice and Ongoing Professional Development. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22(2), 185-197.

Bostock, J. (2019). Exploring In-Service Trainee Teacher Expertise and Practice. Developing Pedagogical Content Knowledge. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 1-12. doi:10.1080/14703297.2018.1562358

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Brehony, K. (2000). Montessori, Individual Work and Individuality in the Elementary School Classroom. *History of Education*, 29(2), 115-128. Retrieved from <http://www.montessori-scientific-research.org>

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. USA: Library Of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (2006). The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In U. Bronfenbrenner, & P. I. and Morris, *Handbook of Child Psychology; Vol. 1, Theoretical Models of Human Development* (pp. 793 - 828). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Cable, D. (2018, April 23). How Humble Leadership Really Works. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from <https://hbr.org>

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Carr, M., & Lee, W. (2012). *Learning Stories: Constructing Learner Identities in Early Education*. London: Sage Publications.
- CDCDE . (2006). *Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. Dublin. Downloaded: http://siolta.ie/media/pdfs/final_handbook.pdf 12/12/2018: The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.
- Cherringwood, S. (2018). Early Childhood Teachers' Thinking and Reflection: a Model of Current Practice in New Zealand. *Early Years - an International Research Journal*, 38(3), 316-334.
- Child Care Act. (1991). Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 S.I. No. 221 of 2016 | dcya.gov.ie 2018.
- Child, D. (1997). *Psychology and the Teacher*. London: Cassell Education.
- Chodkiewicz, A., & Boyle, C. (2014). Exploring the Contribution of Attribution Retraining to Student Perceptions and the Learning Process. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 30(1), 78-87.
- Colgan, A. D. (2016). The Epistemology Behind the Educational Philosophy of Montessori: Senses, Concepts, and Choice. *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, 23(2), 125-140.
- Colwell, J. (2015). *Reflective Teaching*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- CoRe, European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture. (2011). *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care, A Study for the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture*. London . doi:11434125-37

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and Politics in Early Childhood Education*.
London: Routledge Falmer.

Denee, R., & Thornton, K. (2018). Distributed Leadership in ECE: Perceptions and
Practices. *Early Years*, 1-16. doi:10.1080/09575146

Department of Child and Youth Affairs. (2013). *The Right From the Start Report, Expert
Advisory Group on the National Early Years Strategy*, . Dublin: Department of
Children and Youth Affairs.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2015). *Early Years (Pre-school) Recognised
Qualifications*.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2015). *Supporting Access to the Early
Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) for Children with a Disability*.
Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Pobal, Department of Education and Skills.
(2014). *Better Start*. Dublin: National Early Years Quality Development.

Department of Education and Science. (2006). *Siolta - The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education, Sessional Services User Manual*. Dublin:
Department of Education and Science.

Department of Education and Skills. (2013). *Siolta - The National Qualification for Early
Childhood Education*. Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education,,
Dublin. Retrieved May 29, 2019, from <https://www.education.ie>

Department of Education and Skills. (2017). *Early Years Education-focused Inspections in
Early Years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education*

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(ECCE) Programme: Report of a national consultation process. Dublin:

Department of Education and Skills.

Department of Education and Skills. (2018b). *A Review of Early-Years Education-Focused Inspection: April 2016 - June 2017, Insights and Future Developments.* Dublin 1.:

The Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street,.

Department of Health, Department of Child and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills. (2015). *Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).* Dublin: Department of

Health, Department of Child and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills.

Accessed on 14/12/2018 at aim.gov.ie.

Department, Education, & Skills. (2016). *A Guide to Early Years Education Focused*

Inspection (EYEI) in Early Years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood

Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Dublin 1: Evaluation Support and

Research Unit, The Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills.

Department, Education, & Skills. (2018a). *A Review of Early-Years Education-Focused*

Inspection: April 2016 - June 2017. Dublin 1: Inspectorate, Department of

Education and Skills, Marlborough Street.

Dewey, J. (1939). *Creative Democracy - The Task Before Us.* In J. Boyston, (Ed) *John*

Dewey: the later works, 1925 - 1953. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University

Press.

Dunphy, E. (2008). *Supporting Early Learning Through Formative Assessment - A*

Research Paper. Dublin: NCCA.

Education Act. (1998). <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/pdf>.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- European Commission Directorate-General For Education and Culture. (2011). *CoRe - Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. London and Ghent: European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture.
- Falk, B., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). Documentation and Democratic Education. *Theory into Practice*, 49, 72-81.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M., & Rabinow, P. (1991). *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin.
- Freire. (1927). *Pedagogy of the Opressed*. America.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as Cultural Workers*. Boulder Co.: Westview Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Opressed (30th Anniversary ed.)*. New York: Continuum.
- French, G. (2007). Children's Early Learning and Development: A Research Paper. *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*, 1-34. doi:/media/1112/how-aistear-was-developed-research-papers.pdf
- Garvey, D., & Lancaster, A. (2010). *Leadership for Quality in Early Years and Playwork: Supporting your Team to Achieve Better Outcomes for Children and Families*. ebook. Retrieved April 23, 2019, from <https://books.google.co.uk>
- Government of Ireland. (2018). *Action Plan for Education, Quarter 3, Progress Report*. Education. Government of Ireland. Retrieved January 04th, 2019, from www.education.ie
- Government of Ireland. (2018). *First Five. A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019 - 2028*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth Generation in Evaluation*. CA: Sage.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Gudmundsdottir, G., & Brock-Utne, B. (2010). An Exploration of the Importance of Piloting and Access as Action Research. *Educational Action Research, 18*(3), 359-372.
- Harris, A. L., & Robinson, K. (2014). *The Broken Compass*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Harris, A. L., & Robinson, K. (2016). A New Framework for Understanding Parental Involvement: Setting the Stage for Academic Success. *Project Muse, 2*(5), 186 - 201.
- Hayes, N. (2007). *Perspectives on the Relationship Between Education and Care in Early Childhood*. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA. Dublin: NCCA.
- Hayes, N., & Kiernan, M. (2012). *Engaging Young Children: A Nurturing Pedagogy*. Gill and Macmillan. Retrieved March 11, 2017
- Hayes, N., & O'Neill, S. (2019). Little Changes, Big Results: The Impact of Simple Changes to Early Years Learning Environments. *Early Years, 39*(1), 64-79.
- Hayes, N., O'Toole, L., & Halpenny, A. M. (2017). *Introducing Bronfenbrenner - A Guide for Practitioners and Students in Early Years Education*. Cornwall: TJ International Ltd.
- Heikka, J., Halttunen, L., & Waniganayake, M. (2018). Perceptions of Early Childhood Education Professionals on Teacher Leadership in Finland. *Early Child Development and Care, 188*(2), 143-156.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Hersh, E. (2015, November 6). Leading Outside your Authority. *Harvard Business Review*(Hospital and Health Care Administration, Leadership and Management). Retrieved May 26, 2019, from <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu>
- Hornby, G., & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to Parental Involvement in Education: An Update. *Educational Review, 70*(1), 109-119.
- House of the Oireachtas. (2017). *Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs July 2017. Report on the Working Conditions of the Early Years Education and Care Sector 2017*. Dublin: House of the Oireachtas.
- Ivrendi, A. (2017). Early Childhood Teachers' Role in Free Play. *Early Years, 1*-14. doi:10.1080/09575146
- Kember, E., Stringfield, S., & Teddlie, C. (2003). *Mixed Methods Sampling Strategies in Social Science Research. Handbook of mixed methods in the social and behavioural sciences*. (A. T. Tashakkori, Ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Retrieved March 2nd, 2019, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>
- Kiernan, M. (2007). Play as a Context for Early Learning and Development: A Research Paper -. In N. E. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (pp. 3-6). Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- Knott, D., Muers, S., & Aldridge, S. (2008). *Achieving Culture Change: A Policy Framework (A discussion paper by the strategy Unit)*. London. doi:20100304125200
- Kohl, & Chapman, A. (2005-6). *www.businessballs.com*. (A. Chapman, Ed.) Retrieved February 12, 2019, from [bunbury.wa.gov.au](http://www.bunbury.wa.gov.au): <http://www.bunbury.wa.gov.au>

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Kohl, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Kohl, D., Boyatzis, R., & Mainemelis, C. (1999, August 31). Experiential Learning Theory: Previous Research and New Directions. 1-40. Retrieved January 06, 2019, from <https://www.researchgate.net>
- Labaree, D. (1992). Power, Knowledge, and the Rationalisation of Teaching: A Genealogy of the Movement to Professionalise Teaching. *Harvard Educational Review*, pp. 123-155. Retrieved from <https://web.stanford.edu>
- Lather, P., & St. Pierre, E. (2013). Post-qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 629-633.
- Leavers, F. (2005). The Curriculum as Means to Raise the Quality of Early Childhood Education: Implications For Policy. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13(1), 17-29.
- Lehnerer, M. (1996). Caring, Information Control, and Emotionality: Fieldwork Trade-Offs. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 337-350. doi:10.1177/107780049600200306
- Lillard, A. (2013). Playful Learning and Montessori Education. *American Journal of Play*, 5(2), 157-185.
- Lillard, A., Lerner, D., Hopkins, E., Dore, R., Smith, E., & Palmquist, C. (2013). The Impact of Pretend Play on Children's Development: A Review of the Evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(1), 1-34.
- Lillard, P. (1973). *Montessori, A Modern Approach*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Lindon, J., & Lindon, L. (2011). *Leadership and Early Years Professionalism*. London: Hodder Education.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Lopez, G. R. (2001). *On Whose Terms? Understanding Involvement Through the Eyes of Migrant Parents*. Seattle WA: Paper Presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the AERA.
- MacKeown, K., Haase, T., & Pratschke, J. (2015). Determinants of Child Outcomes in a Cohort of Children in the Free Pre-school Year in Ireland. 2012-2013. *Irish Educational Studies*, 34(3), 245-263.
- Madden, R. (2012). *For Love or Money - Exploring The Professional Identity of the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland Today*. Dublin: Submitted to the Department of Early Childhood Studies, Mary Immaculate College - Post Graduate Masters in Research.
- Mertens, D. M. (2015). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology* (4th ed.). CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Molla, T., & Nolan, A. (2018). Identifying Professional Functionings of Early Childhood Educators. *Professional Journal in Education*, 28(3), 1-16.
doi:10.1080/19415257.2018.1449006
- Montessori, M. (1979). *The Secret of Childhood*. New York: Fides Publishers Inc.
- Montessori, M. (1980). *The Absorbent Mind*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.
- Morse, J. M. (2005). Qualitative Research is Not a Modification of Quantitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(1003). doi:10.1177/1049732305280771
- Morse, J., & Niehaus, L. (2009). *Mixed Method Design: Principles and Procedures*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Murphy, R. (2015). Early Childhood Education in Ireland: Change and Challenge. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 8(2), 287-300.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

National Childhood Network; Crann. (2018). *Mercer Recommendationions Re:*

Remuneration Terms for the Early Years Workforce. Health Service Executive,
Department of Social Protection, Pobal, Department of Child and Youth Affairs.
Retrieved February 16th, 2019, from <https://www.ncn.ie>

NCCA, National Council for Curriculum and Assesment. (2016). *Aistear/Siolta Practice Guide.* Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

NCCA, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2009). *Aistear.* Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

NCCA, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2010). Supporting Early Learning Through Formative Assessment. In E. Dunne, *Aistear.* National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

NCCA, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2013). *Aistear in Action Initiative: Final Report.* Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

NCCA, National Council for Curriulum and Assessment, DES, Department of Education and Skills, DCYA, Department of Child and Youth Affairs. (2016). *National Siolta Aistear Initiative.* Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Child and Youth Affairs.
[doi:/en/The-Education-System/Early-Childhood/nsai-newsletter-April-2007.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1080/00137588.2007.1488544)

Newby, P. (2010). *Research Methods for Education.* Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Nolan, A., & Molla, T. (n.d.). Teacher Professional Learning in Early Childhood Education: Insights from a Mentoring Programme. *Early Years*, 38(3), 258-270.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Nutbrown, C. (2012). *Foundations for Quality: Independent Review of Early Educators and Childcare Qualification: Final Report*. London. Retrieved January 22nd, 2019, from <http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview>
- OECD. (2012). *Starting Strong III - A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.
- Office of the Attorney General. (2019, February 24th). *Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003*.
doi:<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2003/act/29/enacted/en/print>
- O'Regan, E. (2012). *Creche children being ill treated and neglected, HSE files reveal*. Independent Newspaper. Retrieved February 16th, 2019, from <https://www.independent.ie>
- Oxford Dictionary*. (2018). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pajo, B. (2018). *Introduction to Research Methods - A Hands on Approach*. California, USA: Sage Publishing Inc.
- Palinkas, L., Horwitz, S., Green, C., Sisdom, J., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2016, March 2nd). *Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, Third Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi:[pmc/articles/PMC4012002/#R21](https://doi.org/10.1080/10801810208839321)
- Piaget, J. (1971). *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child*. London: Lowe & Brydone (Printers) Ltd.
- Pobal. (2018). *Early Years Sector Profile Report 2017 - 2018*. Dublin. Retrieved January 08th, 2019, from <https://www.pobal.ie>

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Price, D; McCallum, F. (2015). Ecological Influences On Teachers' Well-being and 'Fitness'.

Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 3(1), 195-209.

Quinn, J. (1996). Managing Professional Intellect: Making the Most of the Best. *Harvard*

Business Review, 74, pp. 71-80.

Sampson, H. (2004). Navigating the Waves: The Usefulness of a Pilot in Qualitative

Research. *Qualitative Research*, 4(3), pp. 383-402. doi:10.1177/1468794104047236

Santrock, J. W. (2007). *Child Development*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Saric, M., & Steh, B. (2017). Critical Reflection in the Professional Development of

Teachers: Challenges and Possibilities. *CEPS*, 7(3), 67-85. Retrieved April 6, 2019,

from <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si>

Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in action*. London:

Temple Smith.

(2018). *Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years*. Teesside University, Education,

Early Childhood and Youth. Warwick: Teesside University. Retrieved from

<https://www.tees.ac.uk>

Shaughnessy, M., & Shepherd, J. (2018). Psychologically Healthy Workplace. *Salem Press*

Encyclopedia of Health, p. 2.

Shulman, L. (1986). Those who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching. *Educational*

Researcher, 15(2), 1-11. Retrieved from www.jstor.org

Silberfeld, C. H., & Mitchell, H. (2018). Graduates' Perspectives on their Early Childhood

Studies Programmes and Employment Opportunities. *Early Years*, 1-18.

doi:10.1080/09575146

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Improving Children's Attainment Through a Better Quality of Family-Based Support for Early Learning*. London: C4EO: Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Sylva, K. (2004). Researching Pedagogy in English pre-schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5), 713-730.
- Skills, D. o. (2013). *Final Report on the Development and Implementation of the Siolta Quality Assurance Programme*. Dublin: Early Years Education Policy Unit, Department of Education and Skills.
- Smeyers, P. (2008). Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods: Old Wine in New Bottles? On Understanding and Interpreting Educational Phenomena. *Paedagogica Historica*, 44(6), 691-705.
- Soni, A. (2018). Opportunities for Development: The Practice of Supervision in Early Years' Provision in England. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27(1), 1-16.
- Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive Load During Problem Solving: Effects on Learning. *Cognitive Science - A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 257-285.
doi:10.1207/s15516709cog1202_4
- Tate, S., & Sillis, M. (2004). *The Development of Critical Reflection in the Health Professions*. Centre for Health Sciences and Practice, Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), London. Retrieved April 6, 2019, from <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk>

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Totenhagen, C., Hawkins, S., Casper, D., Bosch, L., Hawkey, K., & Borden, L. (2016). Retaining Early Childhood Education Workers: A Review of the Empirical Literature. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 30*(4), 585-599.
- Trodd, L., & Dickerson, C. (2018). 'I enjoy learning': Developing Early Years Practitioners' Identities as Professionals and as Professional Learners. *Professional Development in Education, 45*(3), 1-16.
- Urban, M. (2007). Towards a Critical Ecology of the Profession: Systematic Approaches to Policies, Practices, and Understandings of Professionalism and Professionalism in EC. Paper presented at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association Annual Conferenc., (pp. 1-7). Prague.
- Urban, M. (2010). Rethinking Professionalism in Early Childhood: Untested Feasibilities and Critical Ecologies. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 11*(1).
doi:10.2304/ciec.2010.11.1.1
- Urban, M. (2012). Towards Competent Systems in Early Childhood Education and Care. Implications for Policy and Practice. *European Journal of Education, 47*(4).
- Vujicic, L., & Tambolas, A. C. (2017). Professional Development of Preschool Teachers and Changing the Culture of the Institution of Early Education. *Early Child Development and Care, 187*(10), 1583-1595.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ward Parsons, A., Winneur, J., & Morewood, A. (2016). Professional Development to Promote Teacher Adaptability. *Theory into Practice, 55*(3), 250-258.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Weisberg, D., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2013). Embracing Complexity: Rethinking the Relation Between Play and Learning: Comment on Lillard et al. *Psychological Bulletin*, *139*(1), 35-39.

Werner Andrews, S. (2013). Development of the Imagination and the Role of Pretend Play. Oregon, Northwest Region, Portland. Retrieved January 05th, 2019, from <http://montessori-nw.org>

Wikipedia. (n.d.). Retrieved May 19, 2019, from <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Wrenn, J., & Wrenn, B. (2009). Enhancing Learning by Integrating Theory and Practice. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *21*(2), 258 - 265.

Yarrow, D. (2006). Thinking Interpretively: Philosophical Presuppositions and the Human Sciences. In D. Yarrow and P. Schwartz-Shea, eds. *Interpretation and Methods: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, *34*(4), Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 5-26.

Appendix A: Legislation

Child Care Act (1991, 2006, 2016)

Health, welfare and development of child

19.

- (1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that—
 - (a) each child’s learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and
 - (b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

2006

2

- (5) Each child’s learning, development and well-being needs should be met within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interactions and materials. In meeting these needs, service providers should recognise how children affect and, in turn, are affected by the relationships, environment and activities around them. (Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) 2006: Regulation 5)

Qualifications

- (4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. (5) Paragraph (4) shall apply— (a) on or after 31 December 2016 in respect of pre-school services registered on or before 30 June 2016, and (b) on or after the date of registration in respect of all other pre-school services.

Staff Supervision and Training

- (7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training

Disability Act 2005 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004. The EPSEN Act requires that:

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with: - The best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this Act; - The effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that signatories recognise: the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development.

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities states that Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability and Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education

Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015

The Supreme Court commented on the absence of a legislative definition of collective bargaining and the 2015 Act inserts such a definition as follows:

Sectoral Employment Order:

“...voluntary engagements or negotiations between any employer or employers” organisation on the one hand and a trade union of workers or excepted body to which this Act applies on the other, with the object of reaching agreement regarding working conditions or terms of employment, or non-employment, of workers.”

Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act, 2003

- (2) Subject to subsection (4), where after the passing of this Act a fixed-term employee is employed by his or her employer or associated employer on two or more continuous fixed-term contracts and the date of the first such contract is subsequent to the date on which this Act is passed, the aggregate duration of such contracts shall not exceed 4 years.

Where any term of a fixed-term contract purports to contravene subsection (1) or (2) that term shall have no effect and the contract concerned shall be deemed to be a contract of indefinite duration

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Appendix B: Information and Consent Declaration

My name is Gillian Mannion. I am currently a student at Marino Institute of Education in Dublin. As part of a master's in early education, I am conducting research into needs as experienced by Early Learning and Care practitioners within the context of continuous professional development therefore, would like to get your opinion on the type of professional development or support you would favour most for your service and to ask you to complete a questionnaire on Learning Styles.

I need to ask you some questions in person in relation to the above, at a time and place of your choosing. Any information you provide is completely confidential and anonymous. No comments will be attributable to individuals. A consent form has been provided containing a box for you to tick at the end of this sheet.

Please be aware that you are under no obligation to complete the questionnaire, and you may opt not to continue with it at any time. No penalty will be incurred if you decide not to participate.

Should you decide to participate, it will take 30 minutes approximately to complete. The information you provide is for research purposes only and will be destroyed after 13 months. All information will be stored such that no un-authorized persons will have access to it.

Should you require further information concerning the research being conducted, please contact me at: gillian.mannion@yahoo.ie. You may request a copy of the research when completed if desired. Many thanks for your assistance and participation.

Gillian Mannion.

CONSENT DECLARATION

I have read and fully understand the contents of the information provided. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I give my consent to participate in this study.

(Please tick this box to indicate consent)

Date _____

Signature _____

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Faculty/School Department: Marino Institute of Education, MA, Early Education

Title of Study

An Exploration of the attitudes and needs of Early Learning and Care Providers in relation to CPD

To be completed by the Respondent:

I have been fully informed in relation to this study and have read the information Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes/No

I understand that I am free to withdraw at any stage of the study Yes/No

I agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published Yes/No

I have been informed that the consent form will be kept in the confidence of the researcher? Yes/No

Signed _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix C: Biography of Respondents

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Montessori Services</i>
1	Manager: Montessori Level 8. (DEIS Area).
2	Manager: Crèche and Pre-school. Former Secondary School Teacher, ELC Level 9 (No Montessori Training).
3	Manager: Montessori Level 8.
4	Manager: Montessori (Incorporating Play). Creche and Pre-school. ELC Level 8. (No Montessori training).
10	Manager: Montessori Level 8.
	<i>Play-Based Services</i>
5	Manager: Play based service, ELC Level 8.
6	Manager: Play based service, Retired Primary School Teacher, Level 8.
7	Manager: Play based service, ELC Level 6.
8	Manager: Play based crèche and preschool, ELC Level 8.
9	Manager: Play based crèche and preschool, ELC Level 8.

Note: ELC – Early Education and Care

Appendix D: Quality Guidelines and Empirical Findings

The following is a summary of best practice guidelines in each of four quality categories (DES 2016), and their collated findings (DES, 2018a).

Quality Contexts

The quality contexts derived from the amalgamation of the Aistear and Síolta frameworks and reflected in the Guide (DES, 2016) are as follows:

Area 1 – Quality of Environments

Area 2 - Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development

Area 3 - Quality of children’s experiences and achievements

Area 4 - Quality of management and leadership for learning

(Department, Education, & Skills, 2016).

Area 1 – Quality of environments.

Incorporates Standard 2 – Environments, Standard 3 – Parents and Families, Standard 4 – Consultation (Síolta, 2010), and outcomes 1 – 3 DES (2016).

In this context, children’s sense of identity and belonging (NCCA, 2009) is nurtured by providing opportunities for involving children, families and practitioners in the setting. Practitioners engage with parents in formal and informal communication, consultation and information sharing regarding curricular planning, skills, abilities and cultural sharing. Diversity is valued and affirmed within an inclusive learning environment. The Síolta

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(2010) signpost for reflection (3.3.1) reflects on the importance of “making parents aware of information relevant to their key role” and ‘supporting parents in the use of this information in the home’ (DES, 2010, p. 32).

Inspection outcome

The quality of the context to support children’s learning and development was said to be consistently positive, however, more could be done to ensure that “all children and families are fully represented” (Department Education and Skills, 2018a, p. 14) by using visual displays of diverse communities, minority and disability groups.

Area 2 – Quality of processes to support learning and development.

Incorporating Síolta standard 5, interactions, standard 6 - play, and standard 7 – curriculum (Síolta, 2006) and outcomes 4 - 11, of the Framework Guide (DES, 2016).

According to DES (2016) high quality processes are defined as coherence between Aistear, as a play-based framework and an understanding and incorporation of children’s holistic development. Plans are documented but flexible, encompassing short, medium- and long-term themed aims and goals and high-quality interactions nurture children as confident co-constructors of new meaning through “sustained shared thinking” partnership teaching strategies. Each child’s learning style and pace is valued - encouraging creativity, exploration and challenge which is observed and documented informing the next learning steps (DES, 2016). In the context of Identity and Belonging, (NCCA, 2009) preschool

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

processes should reflect a diverse and inclusive environment incorporating reciprocal relationships.

Inspection outcome

Inspection reports (DES, 2018a) indicate that the highest level of “less than satisfactory” practice was found in this area, specifically, the degree to which “curricula and programmes of learning are informed by Aistear” (Department Education and Skills, 2018a, p. 14). Assessment of children’s learning using observation, and balancing adult-lead and child-led activities was most frequently identified as needing improvement where creativity was not adequately fostered due to predominance of workbook type activities and templates (DES, 2018).

Area 3 – Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievement.

Encompassing Síolta (2010) Standard 9 – Health and Welfare, Standards 12.1 – Communication, Standard 14 – Identity and Belonging and incorporating components 12 to 16.

According to Aistear, (NCCA, 2009) excellence is defined by a sense of well being that children experience during play and learning, through which they developing strategies, skills, and positive learning dispositions, including co-operation, self-regulation, and motivation, exercising choice and engagement with their activities, displaying initiative, self-esteem and confidence in their abilities (DES, 2016) continuing that children should make decisions and reflect on their own learning, creativity, relationships and symbolic

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

understanding while acting on a sense of wonder and curiosity, exploring and thinking and reflecting on their achievements. Children's sense of identity and belonging (NCCA, 2009) is supported through communicating (NCCA, 2009) with others about family, friends, and community leading to concepts about their place in their family network (DES, 2018b).

Inspection outcome

While there was evidence of exemplary practice, the most frequently identified need was reflected in this area. A large portion of inspections indicated that programmes of learning did not reflect diverse children, families and communities. Activities were prescriptive, involving workbooks and templates, practitioners needed to incorporate open-ended challenges facilitating children's reflective learning skills and dispositions. Language, mathematics and communication skills needed additional support. Services also struggled with balancing child and adult initiated activities. In some cases, skilful scaffolding and mentoring was absent leading to children becoming disinterested and frustrated (Department of Education and Skills, 2018a and b).

Area 4 – Quality of management and leadership for learning.

Incorporates standard 8 – planning and evaluation, standard 10 – organization, standard 11 – professional practice, standard 12 – communication (Siolta 2010), and components 17 to 20 (DES, 2016, p. 26 and 27).

Support and supervision of staff in relation to self-evaluation, reflection and review procedures are emphasised as integral to this quality context where the views of children,

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

parents and staff are actively sought and incorporated into planning and analysis. Promoting “concrete, productive” (Department of Education and Skills, 2018b p. 15) partnerships with parent’s families and staff is centrally important while incorporating diversity and cultural difference. Practice is informed through “evidenced based theory” (DES, 2016 p. 27) which staff can avail of through mentoring, and other forms of support, and can seek professional development opportunities to inform theoretical knowledge for practice. Practitioners should encourage informal and formal involvement of parents.

Inspection outcome

While exemplary practice was in evidence, the greatest number of “fair” and “good” judgements were recorded in this category where many services did not engage with supervision practices, where some staff felt excluded and prevented “from engaging in professional activities such as planning and evaluation”. The Inspectorate also found that many services had infrequent contact with parents and families. (DES, 2018b).

In summary, many of these challenges were due to a changing educational landscape requiring the incorporation of Síolta and Aistear within play based and Montessori settings which were historically orientated within the developmental and constructivist ideologies of Piaget and Montessori.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Appendix E: Interview Guide

- Introduction.

Introductions

- Housekeeping (confidentiality and anonymity).
- Brief outline of the study and types of CPD, types of learners.
- Explain ethical considerations.
- Reiterate right to removal from the study at any time.
- Ensure everyone has signed informed consent forms.
- State that a copy of the finished study will be provided for each respondent if desired.
- Collection of (Kohl & Chapman, 2005-6) Learner Style Questionnaire.

The following themes will be discussed:

CPD needs and wants - **Expertise**

- **How is Aistear going for you?**
- **What do you think of Siolta?**
- Would you like training in either or both?
- What kind of CPD would you prefer?

Recognition

- **How do you think Child Care and Child Care professionals are viewed?**
- How do you feel about your status as a childcare worker?
- Do you think “care” and “education” are equally valued?
- Title: practitioner, educator, practitioner (comment)
- Do you think Early Learning and Care should be graduate lead?
- What do you think will improve recognition?

CPD needs and wants - **Reflection**

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Do you use reflection skills in your practice?**
- Who do you reflect with/what do you reflect on?
- Are you happy with your level of skill?
- CPD needs and wants if any?
- Type of CPD preferred

CPD needs and wants – **Responsiveness** (Children and Parents)

- **How would you describe your approach to children’s play and imagination, learning, environment, and choice?**
- What level of involvement do parents display?
- Do they want to know about Aistear/Montessori/play/pre-school practitioners’ role?
- What would you think of a parent hub?
- Would you or your staff like further training in relation to Child and Parent interactions?
- What kind of CPD if any, would be preferred?

CPD needs and wants – **Integrity**

- **What do you understand about the term “integrity”, how is it recognised?**
- **What qualities do you think are required for leadership/management?**
- Do you think they can be taught?
- What planning/management structures/styles do you use for staff?
- Do you need CPD training for management purposes?
- What kind of CPD would you prefer?

Other observations on CPD needs and wants not otherwise noted above

- Thank respondents for their time and input
- Ensure confidentiality and reiterate the right to withdraw from the research at any stage
- Ensure respondents and all relevant personnel have contact details.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Appendix F: E-mail to Services

Dear

Following our telephone conversation, I would like to provide you with some additional information in relation to the study I am conducting as part of a master's in early education.

This research is motivated by the publication in November 2018 of the "First Five" ten-year Strategy (2018) for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) sector proposing that it become graduate lead and engage with training and development. It acknowledges that the ELC workforce is diverse, and as such, that practitioners will display a variety of needs and preferences in that respect. Therefore, my aim is to explore attitudes, needs and to establish practitioners preferred methods of Professional Development.

The research involves completion of a questionnaire on learning styles. In addition, I need to arrange a short meeting with you to talk about your CPD needs and preferences within themes as outlined in the schedule attached. This can be at a time and location of your choosing. If this time frame is not suitable, I can arrange another date.

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and to assure you of your confidentiality and anonymity. The data will be used for the purposes of my research, and as such, will only be seen by myself, my tutor, and my college examiner.

Please contact me at 087-4157312 if you have any questions in relation to this study.

Kind regards,

Gillian Mannion

MA student, Early Education, Marino Institute of Education.

Appendix G: Questionnaire

Kolb's Learning Style Questionnaire



This questionnaire is designed to find out your preferred learning styles(s) as an adult. Over the years, you have probably developed learning habits that help you benefit more from some experiences than from others. You may be unaware of this, and this questionnaire will help you pinpoint your learning preferences and share them with the other Community Facilitators.

This questionnaire will probably take you about 10 minutes to complete. The accuracy of your results depends on how honest you are. There are no right or wrong answers. **If you agree more than you disagree with a statement, place a tick (✓) in the box to the left of the question.** If you disagree more than you agree, leave the box blank. If you find yourself wondering which situation to think of when answering a question, just think about how you are when you are working with people. Go with your first gut reaction instead of over-thinking your response.

QUESTIONS

1. I have strong beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad.
2. I often act without considering the possible consequences.
3. I tend to solve problems using a step-by-step approach.
4. I believe that formal procedures and policies restrict people.
5. I have a reputation for saying what I think, simply and directly.
6. I often find that actions based on feelings are as sound as those based on careful thought and analysis.
7. I like the sort of work where I have time for thorough preparation and implementation.
8. I regularly question people about their basic assumptions.
9. What matters most is whether something works in practice.
10. I actively seek out new experiences.
11. When I hear about a new idea or approach, I immediately start working out how to apply it in practice.
12. I am keen on self discipline such as watching my diet, taking regular exercise, sticking to a fixed routine, etc.
13. I take pride in doing a thorough job.
14. I get on best with logical, analytical people and less well with spontaneous, 'irrational' people.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 15. I take care over how I interpret data and avoid jumping to conclusions.
- 16. I like to reach a decision carefully after weighing up many alternatives.
- 17. I am attracted more to novel, unusual ideas than to practical ones.
- 18. I don't like disorganised things and prefer to fit things into a coherent pattern.
- 19. I accept and stick to laid down procedures and policies so long as I regard them as an efficient way of getting the job done.
- 20. I like to relate my actions to a general principle, standard or belief.
- 21. In discussions, I like to get straight to the point.
- 22. I tend to have distant, rather formal relationships with people at work.
- 23. I thrive on the challenge of tackling something new and different.
- 24. I enjoy fun-loving spontaneous people.
- 25. I pay careful attention to detail before coming to a conclusion.
- 26. I find it difficult to produce ideas on impulse.
- 27. I believe in coming to the point immediately.
- 28. I am careful not to jump to conclusions too quickly.
- 29. I prefer to have as many sources of information as possible – the more information to think over the better.
- 30. Flippant, superficial people who don't take things seriously enough usually irritate me.
- 31. I listen to other people's points of view before putting my own view forward.
- 32. I tend to be open about how I'm feeling.
- 33. In discussions, I enjoy watching the plotting and scheming of the other participants.
- 34. I prefer to respond to events in a spontaneous, flexible way rather than plan things out in advance.
- 35. I tend to be attracted to techniques such as flow charts, contingency plans etc.
- 36. It worries me if I have to rush work to meet a tight deadline.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 37. I tend to judge people's ideas on their practical merits.
- 38. Quiet, thoughtful people tend to make me feel uneasy.
- 39. I often get irritated by people who want to rush things.
- 40. It is more important to enjoy the present moment than to think about the past or future.
- 41. I think that decisions based on a careful analysis of all the information are better than those based on intuition.
- 42. I tend to be a perfectionist.
- 43. In discussions, I usually produce lots of spontaneous ideas.
- 44. In meetings, I put forward practical, realistic ideas.
- 45. More often than not, rules are there to be broken.
- 46. I prefer to stand back from a situation and consider all the perspectives.
- 47. I can often see inconsistencies and weaknesses in other people's arguments.
- 48. On balance I talk more than I listen.
- 49. I can often see better, more practical ways to get things done.
- 50. I think written reports should be short and to the point.
- 51. I believe that rational, logical thinking should win the day.
- 52. I tend to discuss specific things with people rather than engaging in social discussion.
- 53. I like people who approach things realistically rather than theoretically.
- 54. In discussions, I get impatient with irrelevant issues and digressions.
- 55. If I have a report to write, I tend to produce lots of drafts before settling on the final version.
- 56. I am keen to try things out to see if they work in practice.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 57. I am keen to reach answers via a logical approach.
- 58. I enjoy being the one that talks a lot.
- 59. In discussions, I often find I am a realist, keeping people to the point and avoiding wild speculations.
- 60. I like to ponder many alternatives before making up my mind.
- 61. In discussions with people I often find I am the most dispassionate and objective.
- 62. In discussions I'm more likely to adopt a 'low profile' than to take the lead and do most of the talking.
- 63. I like to be able to relate current actions to the longer-term bigger picture.
- 64. When things go wrong, I am happy to shrug it off and 'put it down to experience'.
- 65. I tend to reject wild, spontaneous ideas as being impractical.
- 66. It's best to think carefully before taking action.
- 67. On balance, I do the listening rather than the talking.
- 68. I tend to be tough on people who find it difficult to adopt a logical approach.
- 69. Most times I believe the end justifies the means.
- 70. I don't mind hurting people's feelings so long as the job gets done.
- 71. I find the formality of having specific objectives and plans stifling.
- 72. I'm usually one of the people who puts life into a party.
- 73. I do whatever is practical to get the job done.
- 74. I quickly get bored with methodical, detailed work.
- 75. I am keen on exploring the basic assumptions, principles and theories underpinning things and events.
- 76. I'm always interested to find out what people think.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

77. I like meetings to be run on methodical lines, sticking to laid down agenda.
78. I steer clear of subjective (biased) or ambiguous (unclear) topics.
79. I enjoy the drama and excitement of a crisis situation.
80. People often find me insensitive to their feelings.

Scoring

You score one point for each item you ticked. There are no points for items you crossed. Go back over your responses and simply circle the question number in the table below for each question you ticked. Then add up the number of circled responses in the Totals row.

	QUESTION NUMBER			
	2	7	1	5
4	13	3	9	
6	15	8	11	
10	16	12	19	
17	25	14	21	
23	28	18	27	
24	29	20	35	
32	31	22	37	
34	33	26	44	
38	36	30	49	
40	39	42	50	
43	41	47	53	
45	46	51	54	
48	52	57	56	
58	55	61	59	
64	60	63	65	
71	62	68	69	
72	66	75	70	
74	67	77	73	
79	76	78	80	
Totals:				
	Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Your preferred learning styles

Now circle your **total scores** for each learning style on the table below to determine the strength of your preference.

ACTIVIST	REFLECTOR	THEORIST	PRAGMATIST	
20	20	20	20	Very strong preference
19	19	19	19	
18	18	18	18	
17		17	17	
16		16		
15				
14				
13				
12	17	15	16	Strong preference
11	16	14	15	
	15			
10	14	13	14	Moderate preference
9	13	12	13	
8	12	11	12	
7				
6	11	10	11	Low preference
5	10	9	10	
4	9	8	9	
3	8	7	8	Very low preference
2	7	6	7	
1	6	5	6	
0	5	4	5	
	4	3	4	
	3	2	3	
	2	1	2	
	1	0	1	
	0		0	

✂-----
 Please cut/tear off this section and hand it to your team leader

Name: _____

- I have very strong preference for _____
- I have a strong preference for _____
- I have a moderate preference for _____
- I have a low preference for _____
- I have a very low preference for _____

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ACTIVISTS want practical tasks and very little theory. They learn best from activities where:

- New experiences are emphasised;
- The focus is on the present and on doing such activities as games, problem solving, simulations;
- There is a lot of action and excitement;
- They can lead and be in the limelight;
- Ideas are generated without any concern about practical constraints;
- They have to respond to a challenge and take risks;
- The central focus is on team problem-solving.

THEORISTS want handouts, something to take away and study. They learn best from activities where:

- The learning forms a part of a conceptual whole, such as a model for a theory;
- There is time to explore the interrelationship amongst elements;
- They can explore the theory and methodology underlying the subject under investigation;
- They are intellectually stretched;
- There is a clear and obvious purpose to the activities;
- There is a reliance on rationality and logic;
- They can analyse situations and then generalise their findings;
- They are asked to understand complex situations.

REFLECTORS want lots of breaks to go off and read and discuss. They learn best from activities where:

- There are opportunities to observe and consider;
- There is a strong element of passive involvement such as listening to a speaker or watching a video;
- There is time to think before having to act or contribute;
- There is opportunity for research and problems can be probed in some depth;
- They can review what was happening;
- They are asked to produce reports that carefully analyse a situation or issue;
- There is interaction with others without any risks of strong feelings coming to the fore;
- They can finalise a view without being put under pressure.

PRAGMATISTS want shortcuts and tips. They learn best from activities where:

- There is a clear link back to some job-related problem;
- Material is directed towards techniques that make their work easier;
- They are able to practice what they have learned;
- They can relate to a successful role model;
- There are many opportunities to implement what has been learned;
- The relevance is obvious and the learning is easily transferred to their jobs;
- What is done is practical such as drawing up action plans or trialing techniques or procedures.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

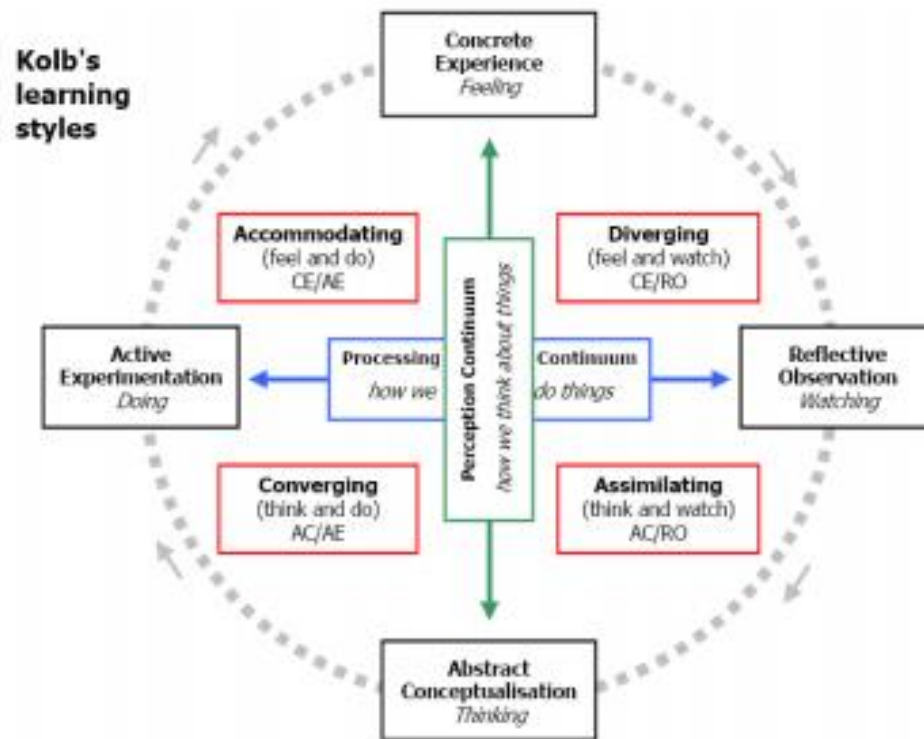
DIVERGERS (Concrete experienter/Reflective observer) take experiences and think deeply about them. They diverge from a single experience to multiple possibilities. When they learn they will ask 'why', and will start from detail to logically work up to the big picture. They like working with others but like things to remain calm – they will be distressed by conflicts in the group. They like to receive constructive feedback.

CONVERGERS (Abstract conceptualization/Active experimenter) think about things and then try out their ideas to see if they work in practice. When they learn they will ask 'how', and will want to learn by understanding how things work in practice. They like facts and will seek to make things efficient by making small and careful changes. They prefer to work alone or independently.

ACCOMODATORS (Concrete experienter/Active experimenter) have the most hands-on approach, with a strong preference for doing rather than thinking. When they learn they will ask 'what if?' and 'why not?' to support their action-first approach. They do not like routine and will take creative risks to see what happens. They learn better by themselves than with others.

ASSIMILATORS (Abstract conceptualiser/Reflective observer) have the most cognitive approach, preferring to think than to act. When they learn they will ask 'What is there I can know?' and like organised and structured understanding. Lectures are their preference, with demonstrations where possible, and will respect the knowledge of experts. People with this style will have a strong control need. They learn best with lectures that start from high-level concepts and work down to the detail.

Extra detail sourced from <http://www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm>



© concept david kolb, adaptation and design alan chapman 2005-06, based on [kolb's learning styles](http://kolb.com/learning_styles) 1984. Not to be sold or published. More free online training resources are at www.kolb.com/learning_styles. Use risk with care.