Early Educational Alignment: Reflecting on Context, Curriculum and Pedagogy

# Learning Environments that Work:
# Softening the Boundaries

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NCCA
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

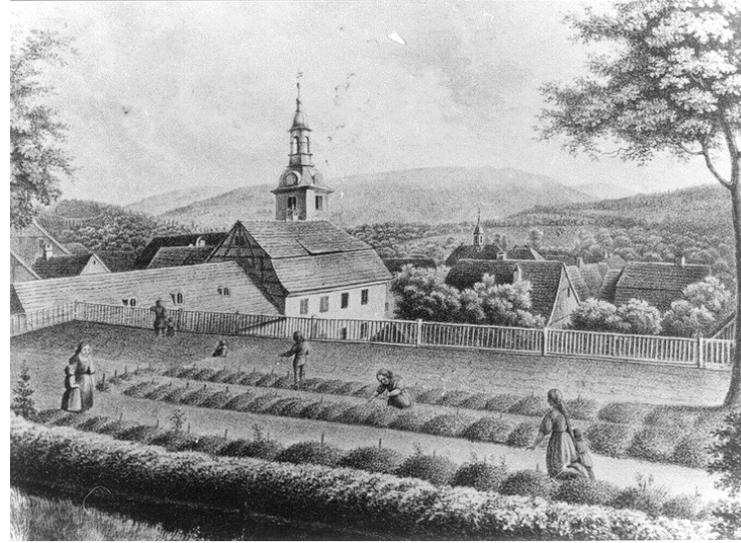# Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries

**Margaret Kernan**

International Child Development Initiatives

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Fuji
Kindergarten
Tokyo

spatiality

*placeness*

materiality

Orientation for solar gain and natural light

affordances of environment

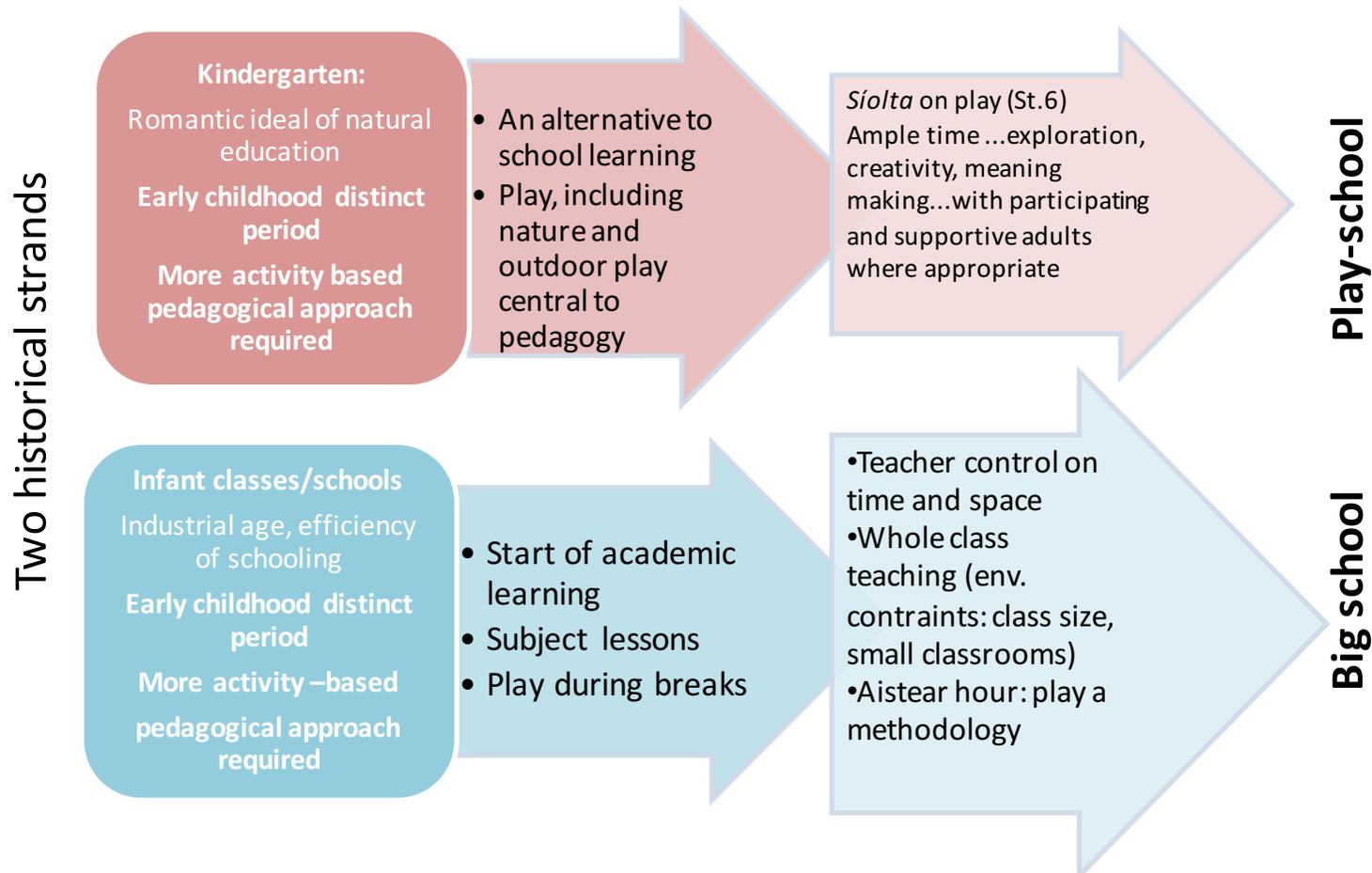Outdoor - indoor connectedness

aesthetics

# Designing for early years environments: some global trends (1)

- 0-3, formative years for cognitive and emotional development and skills
- Importance of child-rearing environment
  - HLE  *Home Learning Environment*

- Integrated family support and ECEC  under one roof

# Designing for early years environments: some global trends (2)

- **Broader view of learning environments**
  - Lifelong and lifewide learning
  - Outdoor as well as indoor
  - Multigenerational community learning spaces
- **Focus on wellbeing of users**
  - Friendly, stimulating senses, liveable in
  - "making space for embodied experiences of children" *(Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2011)*
  - "for toddlers, lived spaces are action spaces"

# Conundrum of play and learning in schools:
# a question of relinquishing teacher control (?)

**Two historical strands**

**Kindergarten:**

Romantic ideal of natural education

**Early childhood distinct period**

**More activity based pedagogical approach required**

- An alternative to school learning
- Play, including nature and outdoor play central to pedagogy

*Síolta* on play (St.6) Ample time ...exploration, creativity, meaning making...with participating and supportive adults where appropriate

**Play-school**

**Infant classes/schools**

Industrial age, efficiency of schooling

**Early childhood distinct period**

**More activity –based**

**pedagogical approach required**

- Start of academic learning
- Subject lessons
- Play during breaks

- Teacher control on time and space
- Whole class teaching (env. contraints: class size, small classrooms)
- Aistear hour: play a methodology

**Big school**

Issue for discussion 1: **Expanding the research base on learning environments in Ireland**

Lack of research in Ireland on design of learning environments and the relationship between environmental design and children's wellbeing, learning and development

What accounts for its neglect and what is necessary to stimulate further research in this area?

Issue for discussion 2: **Adult-child power dynamics and children's agency in learning in the early years**

There has been some research on the structuring of children's time and space, on control and power relationships between adults and children in ECEC and schools settings.

What contribution could further research on power dynamics in early years environments make to our knowledge about children's agency in the learning process in ECEC and school settings?

How could this research contribute to enhancing continuity in young children's learning across ECEC and primary school settings?

Issue for discussion 3: **Imagining learning environments of the future**

Proposed that 21st century learning environments extend beyond school buildings to include all settings (spaces and places) used by learners.

How might we envision such an expansive view of learning environments, beyond the traditional focus on family home, the ECEC and school setting?

What contribution could interdisciplinary research make in addressing the challenges and opportunities of such a vision of early learning environments?

# Discussion questions about learning environments

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What contribution could further research on power dynamics in early years environments make to our knowledge about children's agency in the learning process in ECEC and school settings?

How could this research contribute to enhancing continuity in young children's learning across ECEC and primary school settings?

How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments, beyond the traditional focus on family home, the ECEC and school setting?

What contribution could interdisciplinary research make in addressing the challenges and opportunities of such a vision of early learning environments?