

Early Educational Alignment Symposium

Summary of Group Reports

10/15/2015

Hosted by Trinity College Dublin and the National Council for
Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA)

This synthesis report was prepared for RECEC/NCCA by Michele Giblin.

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Summary

The Early Educational Alignment symposium was held in Trinity College Dublin on October 15th 2015. It was organised by the Researching Early Childhood Education Collaborative (RECE), in partnership with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Four guest speakers presented on the following topics: Does terminology matter? (Mr. Toby Wolfe), Learning Environments that work, softening the boundaries (Dr. Margaret Kernan), Untangling the knots (Dr. Mary Maloney) and Multiple transitions in Early childhood (Dr. Mary O’Kane). These topics formed the basis for group discussion with the intention of producing research questions or statements that could be used to generate a research agenda in Early Childhood Education (birth to 8) in Ireland. To this end the attendees (comprising of practitioners, academics, researchers and other stakeholders in the Early Years educational arena) were divided into eight multi-disciplinary groups. Each group was appointed a colour as a name, and following each of the four papers, discussed the topic within group, culminating each session with group research questions /statements.

Throughout the eight groups there was a large degree of consensus regarding the salient concerns emanating from each of the guest speaker’s presentations. In response to Mr. Tony Wolfe’s paper, all groups agreed that terminology mattered greatly, influencing both the perception of workers and by workers within the sector and also influencing how the sector was regarded generally. There was also broad agreement about the impact of the economic market and OECD on discourse surrounding EY and the usage of market driven terms entering EY terminology. Words have power, and this power is seen in the status attached to particular terms such as “care” and “education”, with care (childcare) perceived at a lower level. Over 70% of children are in some form of childcare and there is fuzziness over functions and particular types of childcare, which was considered to be unfair to children, workers and parents. Oftentimes the uses of particular language served to dis-empower and de-motivate workers. This was emphatically regarded as a very salient topic in need of urgent attention, with a call to research and develop a suitable terminology such that :” The challenge is to find a term that will be acceptable to all groups of professionals and still be broad enough not to “stymie” any group.”

Dr. Margaret Kernan’s paper focused on learning environments, the use of space and the impact of good/bad design on the enjoyment and usefulness of same by the end users. Many drew attention to the impact of regulations, health and safety guidelines and the HSE on design with the overriding feeling that they created a fear about being adventurous in spatial design for early years spaces. Some raised the question as to what extent, if any, children are consulted regarding design of their space. There was also a call to expand our understanding as to what constitutes a learning environment. It was suggested that we could learn from examples of good practise in other countries and that it would be useful to refer to UNESCO’s guidelines in this area.

During the group discussions following Dr. Mary Maloney’s paper there was consensus that “care” was considered highly important and largely undervalued since the terms “care” and “education” had been

separated. This provoked debate as to whether “care” could be elevated in status (it was believed that this was necessary) and how this could be credentialised and thus appreciated and expressed in professional terms. Whilst there was overall agreement that this sector needs to have a designated professional status, there were two strands of thought regarding professionalism. Some debated as to how wide a “professional” net could be cast and whether everybody working in this sector should be credentialised and considered a professional. The other strand discussed was how professionalism could be enacted on par with similar caring professions (nursing, for example) and how terms of employment, wages and conditions could be improved. Some believed that it was vital to have CPD in this respect and many felt that qualification were necessary from level seven upwards.

The final paper by Dr. Mary O’ Kane discussed multiple transitions that occur in early childhood. The groups all concurred that change in attitude was necessary in terms of how the sector is regarded by the public and in terms of how workers within the sector regard themselves. The notion of child readiness was discussed by many with transition booklets regarded as useful in helping the child and parent prepare for change. Many felt that a wealth of information and knowledge was being ignored, that information emanating from workers within crèches and similar units, and from the children themselves was extremely pertinent. Power was once again highlighted, with attention given to the power resting with teachers in primary school to decide the extent to which they would engage and communicate with EY educators. Aistear was identified by many as a useful source of help in the transitioning process.

To summarise the findings from the groups, it is evident that there is emphatic agreement that the sector needs to examine itself and find a way in which to elevate its status in terms of professional identity. To this end there must be a clear and precise terminology associated with roles and responsibilities developed which should be guided by the sector rather than the market. Attention has to be paid to remuneration and working conditions, so as staff do not continually get disillusioned and graduates feel that their qualifications are being adequately rewarded. Power relationships need to be addressed; between the sector and political entities, the public, and teachers in primary schools. The agency of the child needs to be acknowledged and the power relationship between adult and child explored. In terms of the environment, we could learn a lot from practices in other countries and should not be so subservient to regulations nor keep such a tight rein on our creativity.

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List of suggested research questions and potential research focus

Group	Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe.	Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries. Margaret Kernan.	Untangling the knots. Mary Maloney	Multiple transitions in early childhood. Mary O’Kane
Green(1)	Do we need a common language? If we decide we do need this, how do we develop same?	Need for those within this sector to research and define their own working/learning environment.	Care as a concept may not be well regarded within society and by those inspecting the profession. The professionalism within the sector has led to an increase in credentialisation. Impact of increasing the amount and levels of qualifications. Poor conditions within the EY sector .	Change is necessary. Broadly a socio-cultural shift is required that encompasses education and care discourse.
Purple (2)	How do children understand their ECEC setting & practitioners?	Attitudes, re letting go, relinquishing control. Who decided? Consulted children in the design? What’s their ideal? What are the barriers and facilitators around learning environs and physical	Exploring the discrepancies/similarities between Early Years + Primary. How does any professional group acquire status, what is it that confers	What are the funds of knowledge – children as active learners- what are preschools doing for transitions into primary?

		space. Way of thinking. Conceptions of children. How policy and regulation may be barriers. Attitudes? Children consulted?	status: Professionalisation, Unionisation, ITE collective strength-identity?	
Orange(3)	Pink: no evidence that there is an impact. Red; terminology does matter. Matters for our identity, values implicit in terminology.	Expand the research base on learning environments in Ireland. Why? Adult/child power dynamics- what contribution could further research on dynamics in EY environments (children's agency) [have]? How might we envision a more expansive view of learning environment?	Examine different integrated models throughout the world and then propose one that could work in Ireland. Learn from the experience of other sectors. Care needs to be valued and given higher levels of funding. Explore possibility of introduction CPD to achieve this.	How is information transferred systematically and consistently- (the crèche-knows so much about the child)- teachers wanting to start fresh. Do not want child labelled.
Light Blue (4)	Does it really matter? Parents/ Educators/ Politicians- Impact, Measure, Inspect. Are things affected here- why? Consequences. Are we speaking the same language? School-Preschool.	What is necessary to stimulate future research? Adult/child power dynamics- children's agency- contribution, _ knowledge about children's agency, - continuity of terms across ECEC and Primary? How might? Imaginary learning environment beyond home, school, ECEC. What contribution : interdisciplinary addresses the challenges and opportunities?	How can care be elevated? Does a degree confer status? Should we have full integrated ECCE_ why, how? Is everybody working due a title?	What do we like to be the resultant personal experience of children during early childhood.
Yellow (5)	The need to work at arriving at a shared understanding of this sector and establish terms in this manner rather than having terminology thrust upon it.	The need to identify the agency of children in early learning groups and the community and to foster a broader relationship and understanding within the wider community.	The issue of professionalism needs to be addressed and most felt that qualifications at level 7-8 were necessary for	Aistear training should be mandatory and teachers must be more trusting of the agency of the child.

	<p>What are we calling ourselves and why, what do we want to be called? Research needed on different perspectives- child parent, those working in sector.</p>	<p>Impact of regulation on the environment. Case studies of people who have done different things with some reg. framework. Environment- boundaries, environment, communal spaces, community. Layout, organisation, things you provide/don't provide, purpose of what you do.</p>	<p>all early childhood professionals.</p>	<p>How is Aistear being used in different environments and what input is it having? What makes schools engage in Aistear? – principals, teacher, interest in early education - older teachers from 1971 curriculum came back- going back to what is right for children. Needs catalyst to drive it. Needs national roll out.</p>
Pink (6)	<p>Need for evidence based information on the impact of terminology and perceptions regarding the impact of terminology across a broad range of stakeholders.</p>	<p>What knowledge and understanding do architects involved in designing spaces for young children have of (ECE) early learning, children's preferences for the spaces they occupy: e.g. of play?</p>	<p>The ECCE sector should be funded on the same basis as the primary and secondary sector. Those with level 5 &6, how do graduates (level 5 &6) working in ECCE sector articulate their career aspirations and their aspirations for the development of the sector? Voice of the professionalism.</p>	<p>How do the following articulate their role in supporting the child's transition into the school: School Principal, Board of Management, Parents, Junior & Senior Infant Teachers, Pre-school provider, Pre-school professionals?</p>
Navy (7)	<p>The challenge is to find a term that will be acceptable to all groups of professionals and still be broad enough not to "stymie" any group.</p>	<p>What accounts for neglect of proper/appropriate space and what is necessary to stimulate research in the area? Research on power dynamics. What could further research on power</p>	<p>What is needed of the system to put the infrastructure in place for the professionalization of early childhood educators?</p>	<p>How can we radically align the early years and primary sector to create a seamless educational experience for the birth to 6 cohort? What might a public/private partnership between sectors</p>

		<p>dynamics make to our knowledge and agency (children's)?</p> <p>Learning environments of the Future: expansive view of learning environments. Public and community spaces.</p> <p>What are the obstacles that prevent consultation between children/parents/educators/architects?</p>		<p>look like in terms of this alignment?</p> <p>What steps does the sector need to take to become unionised?</p>
Red (8)	<p>Call for a review of training institutes graduate surveys as potentially useful in informing progression within the sector.</p> <p>Development of a question that examines the values that underpin the terminology/language used by all of the key stakeholders, and in particular the terminology used in the title of those working with children.</p>	<p>Need to consult with children in the design of their own space.</p>	<p>Development of a model that positions the child as a focal point.</p> <p>Combined sector training programmes.</p> <p>Research into the impact of the terms "gender" and "care"</p>	<p>Consider the use of a "passport" for transitioning children.</p> <p>Challenge taken for granted perceptions.</p>

Does terminology matter? Toby Wolfe.

Summaries

Group	
Green (1)	<i>The group amalgamated the three prime questions in their discussion, concluding with two key group questions; Do we need a common language? If we decide we need this, how do we develop same? In arriving at these two questions the discussion group considered the contribution by other education stakeholders (incl., Minister of State) to the recognition and valuing of the contribution made by EY sector in the overall educational arena; the need for actors in the EY sector to have active input and involvement in determining the way forward; recognition of the concept of “care”; and the difficulties surrounding the use of language and terminology, delivery of service sector education and the status of the EY sector.</i>
Purple (2)	<i>This group came to the conclusion that the sector is in a state of flux, lacking clarity re terms, openness, and, at times, contrived language. They suggest that terminology is influenced by market forces and neuroscience, citing the influence of OECD in education and labour market divisions being evident as a political tool. They debated whether terminology emerges from practice or is contrived through agendas. Reference was made to the use of the word “teacher” by children, and suggested that terms are important for identity. This session culminated in a research question: How do children understand their ECEC setting & practitioners?</i>
Orange (3)	<i>This group discussed whether there was a need to change terminology or to change ways of thinking, whether to reflect public discourse or reframe the discussion. They explored the nature of EY in terms of function and the broad array of stakeholders involved. They touched on the topic of comparison with other countries and the historical legacy of EY within the Irish domain. They concluded with a statement: Pink: no evidence that there is an impact. Red; terminology does matter. Matters for our identity, values implicit in terminology.</i>
Light Blue (4)	<i>This group called for a return to public discourse, suggesting that language in this sector was embedded and driven by market and neuroscience discourse. They highlight that the sector is in the process of change and that language plays a part in this. They raised three questions: (1) Does it really matter? Parents/ Educators/ Politicians- Impact, Measure, Inspect. (2) Are things affected here- why? Consequences. (3) Are we speaking the same language? School-Preschool.</i>
Yellow (5)	<i>This group did not formulate a specific research question from this discussion. Overall they regarded that the terminology was important. It affects the interpretation of parents as to the value placed on early education and care. They identified the need to work at arriving at a shared understanding of this sector and establish terms in this manner rather than having terminology thrust upon it. This group decided that terminology definitely mattered and discussed the topic in terms of power, evolution of terms, resistance to some (e.g. Curriculum) and usage of others (e.g. teacher). They highlighted the separation of the terms “care” and</i>

	<p><i>“education” and suggested that care, childcare is perceived at a low level. It was suggested that language dis-empowers people working in this sector and this has can have a knock-on effect on children. They discussed the fact that the role of the ECCE scheme has changed and it is seen as pre-school preparation. They also raised the usage of market terminology. The session formulated the following question/research focus: What are we calling ourselves and why, what do we want to be called? Research needed on different perspectives- child parent, those working in sector.</i></p>
Pink (6)	<p><i>This group used questions to generate discussion. They concluded that there is need for evidence based information on the impact of terminology and perceptions regarding the impact of terminology across a broad range of stakeholders.</i></p>
Navy (7)	<p><i>This group formed the opinion that terminology was key to this topic, holding the view that discourse influenced cognition. They highlighted the impact of market orientated and neuro-scientific language permeating discourse surrounding education, as well as lack of agreed terminology within the sector to describe accurately, for example, specific job opportunities. Also emphasised was the change in childcare and infant care since the '70s with over 70% of children being cared for by childminders. There has been an accompanying change in terms of function- school readiness is seen as replaced by emergentism. The need for clarity in terms of sector relationship with parents and public was discussed in addition to reflecting on the education provided within the third level sector for potential educators. Overall, attention was paid to vagueness in this sector regarding boundaries, play, function, recognition by parents and public of aspects of this sector, and the need to adopt appropriate terminology to best describe nature and function of sector and employees within sector. This group did not conclude with a specific research but suggested that : “The challenge is to find a term that will be acceptable to all groups of professionals and still be broad enough not to “stymie” any group.”</i></p>
Red (8)	<p><i>The group decided that the uses of terminology to describe, credentialise and to work within the sector was highly significant and value laden. They acknowledged the impact of historical experience, parent and public perceptions, in terms of the usage and expectations of the sector, suggesting that this was exposed in sector terminology and thus in sector value. They highlighted the different uses of terminology within training institutions (educator) and on the ground, for example, “childcare worker”. They drew attention to a similar phenomena within the different levels of professional education (FETAC) with “childcare” used to describe levels 5 & 6, and “EY” in terms of levels 7 &8. They also debated the differential in value attached to the terms “care” and “education” and questioned why the former appears to be less valued than the latter and indeed why there is a need to have created a divide and to continue to uphold the divide between those two terms. Moving forward, they suggested (1) a review of training institutes graduate surveys as potentially useful in informing progression within the sector and (2) development of a question that examines the values that underpin the terminology/language used by all of the key stakeholders, and in particular the terminology used in the title of those working with children.</i></p>

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Summaries

Group	
Green(1)	<i>The group did not derive any questions for this session. Their discussion identified a tension within the EY space between regulation, commodification, control, external expectations versus creativity and uncovering subtle nuances as expressed by children. The impact of the market on process within the EY arena was considered as well as the need for those within this sector to research and define their own working/learning environment.</i>
Purple (2)	<i>The group inquired as to whether the design of the physical environment worked for all stakeholders. They discussed examples of early childhood experiences garnered from other countries experiences and from established research. The position and influence of OECD and UNESCO was debated. Power was debated in terms of relationship between teacher and child, elitism and in terms of regulations, Garda vetting, for instance. The session drew to a close in formulating the following research questions: Attitudes, re letting go, relinquishing control. Who decided? Consulted children in the design? What's their ideal? What are the barriers and facilitators around learning environs and physical space. Way of thinking. Conceptions of children. How policy and regulation may be barriers. Attitudes? Children consulted?</i>
Orange(3)	<i>In this session the group highlight the lack of forward planning and research based building and use of space in learning environments in Ireland. They explored the dynamic within space in the sense of who it was supposed to be working for, (for example, parents, children or inspectors) and the functions that should be encompassed (for example, art, science, play). Reference was made to historical context, to the effect of economics and short term solutions (sticking plasters) that become long term fixes (for example prefabs). They called for a cross disciplinary approach in terms of planning and auditing, to including child proofing and curriculum proofing. From this session they highlighted three questions: (1) Expand the research base on learning environments in Ireland. Why? (2) Adult/child power dynamics- what contribution could further research on dynamics in EY environments (children's agency)[have]? (3) How might we envision a more expansive view of learning environment?</i>
Light Blue (4)	<i>Comparison was made with International examples. The call was made for more research to be done in this area with reference made to UNESCO's guidelines. A challenge was identified in terms of making space work for all stakeholders in addition to engaging with the community. Aistear was identified in terms of a clash of culture and giving up control. This group devised three research questions: (1) What is necessary to stimulate future research? (2) Adult/child power dynamics- children's agency- contribution, knowledge about children's agency,- continuity of terms across ECEC and Primary?</i>

	<i>(3) How might? Imaginary learning environment beyond home, school, ECEC. What contribution : interdisciplinary addresses the challenges and opportunities?</i>
Yellow (5)	<p><i>For this session the group focused on developing our understanding of the growing child within education, care and the community. They highlighted the need to identify the agency of children in early learning groups and the community and to foster a broader relationship and understanding within the wider community.</i></p> <p><i>This group discussed the contribution of architects to designing space, and the impact of regulation and fear of litigation as boundaries within this sector. They suggested that poor spatial design was due to the emphasis on function rather than aesthetic and lack of meaningful consultation between users and designers.. They highlighted the weighty influence of regulation and litigation on practice, the broad reach of “health and safety” and the fear of challenging this. They noted that propensity to “bubble wrap” children. They discussed other alternatives and practice in other countries. They derived the following research questions/focus: (1) Impact of regulation on the environment. (2) case studies of people who have done different things with some reg. framework. (3) Environment- boundaries, environment, communal spaces, community. (4) Layout, organisation, things you provide/don’t provide, purpose of what you do.</i></p>
Pink (6)	<i>This group formulated a specific research question from this discussion. They framed the question to raise the issue of the nature of architects’ knowledge of ECE and the extent to which this impacts on design.</i>
Navy (7)	<i>The group reflected on the lack of interdisciplinary collaboration between professionals and stakeholders in designing learning environments for children. Examples of practices in other countries were discussed. The need to extend the concept of learning environments to include family and a broader array of environments was discussed. The focus on content rather than space and imaginative uses of spaces was emphasised. Questions that were formed: 1) what accounts for neglect of proper/appropriate space and what is necessary to stimulate research in the area? (2) Research on power dynamics. What could further research on power dynamics make to our knowledge and agency (children’s)? (3) Learning Environments of the Future: expansive view of learning environments. Public and community spaces. (4) what are the obstacles that prevent consultation between children/parents/ educators/ architects?</i>
Red (8)	<i>The group drew attention to lack of capital funding and support for innovative projects, in addition to the challenges presented by; traditional expectations of parents in terms of classroom spaces, lack of interdisciplinary involvement in spatial design, the influence of health and safety regulations in terms of discouraging risk taking which was considered essential to child development. The manner in which Aistear was implemented was also discussed in addition to the varied and multifaceted innovative practices exposed in ESRI studies regarding special classes. It was suggested that there is a need to consult with children and to empower children by involving them in the design of their own space as competent contributors to, and users of, the space.</i>

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Summaries

Group	
Green (1)	<p><i>This group discussion identified several questions pertinent to the topic. Four main concerns emerged: care as a concept may not be well regarded within society or by those engaged in administering/inspecting the profession; the professionalism within the sector has led to an increase in credentialisation which could be blurring the importance of the care concept, increasing the amount and levels of qualifications which impacts on behaviour of and to actors in the sector and the administration of curricula in terms of training EY professionals was questioned; willing to accept change within the sector was discussed and finally poor conditions within the EY sector were highlighted as reasons why many leave this sector to engage in the primary education sector.</i></p>
Purple (2)	<p><i>In this session the group debated the concept of care and whether or not it could be elevated in status. They identified a multifaceted struggle for a professional status and identity, and regarded as key the necessity to dispel myths around the sector and gender. They highlighted Aistear as being useful in signalling continuum within education whilst allowing for diversity. They suggest the following as a research question: Exploring the discrepancies/similarities between Early Years + Primary. How does any professional group acquire status, what is it that confers status: Professionalisation, Unionisation, ITE collective strength-identity?</i></p>
Orange (3)	<p><i>The group considered that “care” must be appreciated in professional terms. That quality care has a hidden delivery cost –five hours to provide three hours care. The degree requirements are nearly on par with those of primary teachers yet the working environment and pay is demoralising in terms of professional payback. They also highlighted the need for more visibility of qualifications- suggesting that these be displayed in used rooms. The group discussed the more favourable conditions and practises in other countries and in comparison with nursing. They highlight gaps in funding and pay, payment for some tasks but not for others. They condemn the decision to split care and education. They formed the opinion that more clarity is necessary within the profession, a professional identity is required, with conditions and pay on par with other similar professionals. They suggest that the government needs to take more responsibility and suggested a research focus: Examine different integrated models throughout the world and then propose one that could work in Ireland.</i></p> <p><i>In this session the group reviewed the concept of “care” in terms of how to raise the importance of the surrounding the concept. They explored professionalism in terms of how wide the net of the term professional should be, suggested that qualifications should be in place for those dealing with all ages ranges including babies. They discussed the need for appropriate attention to be given to pay and conditions and emphasised how demoralising it is to have a degree and work for minimum wage. They suggested that the section could learn something from looking at other sectors (for example nursing, registered electricians) and how they conduct their qualifications and remuneration structure, and highlighted the fact that the Government will pay subsidies to places with higher qualifications. They concluded with two points: learn from the experience of other sectors, and care needs to be valued and given higher levels of funding. They suggest introducing CPD to assist in the latter.</i></p>

Light Blue (4)	-----
Yellow (5)	<p><i>This group identified problems around the status of the concept of “care” , the separation of “care” and “education”, the dropping of the term in some cases to enhance status of degree course, and the retention in other cases as a contribution to a political agenda. There was debate as to the content of educational training courses at various levels, and discussion generally regarding the need for attention to be paid to professional and academic standards. Features of other disciplines were discussed (nursing/ medical professionals) for comparison, in addition to reflecting on international research in the field. The need for all to have a degree was discussed together with comment on the fact that higher mandatory education increased quality. The notion of childminder and how they fitted into this sector and the professional debate was touched upon. Divisions between public-private, social class, urban-rural were identified. Overall this group felt that the issue of professionalism needs to be addressed and most felt that qualifications at level 7-8 were necessary for all early childhood professionals.</i></p>
Pink (6)	<p><i>The group devised questions to promote discussion with concerns regarding professions and professional dominating this session . The valuing of “care” provoked debate in terms of how the concept could be elevated within the educational arena. Professionalism and the reach of same was debated in terms of the extent to which care of young children could be considered professional, in addition to considering the status that is assumed to accompany a degree. The group were firmly of the belief that privatisation of ECE outside of the school system was the crux of the present issue, and called for funding of the sector on par with that of the primary and secondary sector. They also raised concerns as to how graduates were able to express themselves in terms of career and sector development at the current time.</i></p>
Navy (7)	<p><i>In this session the group emphasised the need for increased clarity regarding the professionalism of this sector from educators themselves, public and associated stakeholders. Education of actors within the sector and requirements thereof was discussed. There was a feeling that overall there was a lack of trust in the sector fuelled by the monitoring processes and guidelines from Siolta and Aistear. The group formed many discussion questions but posed a particular question for future research: What is needed of the system to put the infrastructure in place for the professionalisation of early childhood educators?</i></p>
Red (8)	<p><i>It was suggested by the group that the focus should be placed on providing the best learning experience for the child, facilitated by a competent adult, rather than dwelling on whether everyone is worthy of professional status. The group acknowledged the need for professionals to be aware of what actually happens in various educational settings and the need for a continuum of care and education. They highlighted the potential usefulness of a shared Aistear CPD between teachers and EY professionals in terms of accommodating this. They questioned the lack of government involvement in provision for children below the age of four and suggested that this might not be the best way to achieve greater sector integration. Ultimately they called for a model that keeps the child as a focal point in future research, and training programmes that provides combined CPD training, as essential. They also highlighted the need to be aware of and research the impact of the terms “gender and Care” on the EY sector.</i></p>

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood. Mary O’Kane

Summaries

Group	
Green (1)	<i>The group did not formulate specific research questions at the end of this session. This group highlighted the need for a change in attitude (about the EY sector and workers within this sector) both by those outside the sector and those within. The diversity and wealth of knowledge within the sector should be acknowledged and encouraged. Change is necessary. Broadly a socio-cultural shift is required that encompasses education and care discourse.</i>
Purple (2)	<i>In this session the group discussed transitions and child readiness in terms of shared responsibility and using funds of knowledge. They highlighted the use of an interactionist approach, Aistear and the importance of context. They suggested that transition booklets which involve the participation of parents and child were useful and highlighted tensions regarding status disparity. They formed the question: What are the funds of knowledge – children as active learners- what are preschools doing for transitions into primary?</i>
Orange (3)	<i>Resulting from this session the group highlighted the usefulness of Aistear as a tool to influence change, especially in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy. They identified specific aspects of transitions (systematic, consistent, multi-directional and features(environments, uniforms, funds of knowledge, growing up rituals) that they regarded as important. The issue of “readiness” and the responsibility for readiness was discussed together with the need to build better, more integrated relationships between pre-school and primary school sectors. Examples of good working models were discussed. The need for face to face relationships was emphasised. A particular question formed was: How is information transferred systematically and consistently- (the crèche-knows so much about the child)- teachers wanting to start fresh. Do not want child labelled.</i>
Light Blue (4)	<i>The group did not formulate research questions during this session. They discussed what they would like to be the resultant personal experience of children during early childhood.</i>
Yellow (5)	<i>How to gage the readiness of the child in psycho-social and psycho-educational was discussed with issues being identified as the age of transition, pedagogy, and outdated school readiness discourse. Staff- pupil ratios, the needs of new teachers fitting in to an already established school culture were identified as problematic areas. The group didn’t form a specific research question, but suggested that Aistear training should be mandatory and that teachers must be more trusting of the agency of the child.</i>
Pink (6)	<i>This group formulated a specific question: How do the following articulate their role in supporting the child’s transition into the school: School Principal, Board of Management, Parents, Junior & Senior Infant Teachers, Pre-school provider, Pre-school professionals?</i>
Navy (7)	<i>In this session the group considered the focus on developing skill sets rather than context, suggesting that the focus should be less on the child’s readiness and more on the institution’s contribution to that state of readiness. The group highlighted the need for more coherence between EC setting and EC educators, schools and home and identified Aistear as being well placed in supporting engagement in pre-school and</i>

	<p><i>primary sectors. They made suggestions as to how this might be achieved; shared third level foundation level as part of third level studies, opportunities to participate in each other's alternative professional setting and education of parents. Questions concluding this session: 1) how can we radically align the early years and primary sector to create a seamless educational experience for the birth to 6 cohort? (2) What might a public /private partnership between sectors look like in terms of this alignment? (3) What steps does the sector need to take to become unionised?</i></p>
Red (8)	<p><i>Group did not formulate a specific research question for this topic. In this session the group highlighted the need to change perceptions between stakeholders and between the sector and the public. The growing realisation of the usefulness of the EY sector in terms of child development, education and preparation for the school setting, was welcomed. It was felt that Aistear would be particularly useful in terms of smoothing transitions between home, EY and school settings, and (in terms of sector dialogue and cooperation) providing shared sector CPD courses. Moving forward they suggested the use of a "passport" for the child transitioning between EY and the school setting , and the need to challenge taken for granted perceptions.</i></p>

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Mary Beare Aust	Criona Blackburne	Josephine Bleach	Judith Butler	Deborah Clarke	Aoife Cooney	Mel Duffy	Marie Corbett
Marie Collins	Mary Daly	Emma Dineen	Geraldine Doran	Liz Dunphy	Jacqueline Fallon	Gina Cullen	Therese Farrell
Evelyn Egan Rainy	Catriona O'Toole	Denise Flood	Siobhan Fogarty	Karen Higgins	John Kane	Geraldine French	Karen Fitzgerald
Mairead Fenlon	Arlene Foster	Clare Farrell	Fiona Giblin	Jones Irwin	Declan Kelleher	Grainne Kent	Anne Looney
Mary McSkeane	Patricia McCaffrey	Marlene McCormack	Judy Irwin	Louise Kinlen	Marie Gibbons	Joan Kiely	Marguerita Magennis
Conor Mellon	Maire Mhic Mhathuna	Ciara Ní Bhrion	Roisin McGlone	Deirdre Mc Grath	Joanne Mc Hale	Sinéad Matson	Selina McCoy
Colette Murray	Geraldine Nolan	Margaret O'Donoghue	Deirbhile Ní Craith	Kay O'Sullivan	Jacqui Quinn	Rita Melia	Ian McKenna
Marian Quinn	Sandra O'Neill	Patrick Sullivan	Meera Oke	Jan Petteerson	Glenda Walsh	Leah O'Toole	Rose Murphy
Sinéad McGlacken	Catherine Shanahan	Ann Marie Tiernan	Bridie Thornton	Orla McKiernan	Orla Walsh	Marie Russell	Pat O'Connor
Margaret Rogers	Grainne Gannon		Ruth Black				

Green	Purple	Orange	Light Blue	Yellow	Pink	Navy	Red
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Groups

Yellow = reporter

green = facilitator

Appendices

Group Report Transcripts

Notes from the Green Group. 1.

Facilitator: Marie Collins

Reporter: Conor Mellon

Members: Mary Beare Aust, Evelyn Egan Rainy, Mairead Fenlon, Mary McSkeane, Colette Murray, Marian Quinn, Sinead McGlacken, Margaret Rogers.

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we access/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Broad agreement that that it does. Who creates the language? Groups with vested interests? Where are children as citizens?
- DCYA strategy- 8 and over- children's voices being represented. Reggio Emilia- ours, their own words. History of that. EY Strategy- there is a consultation with 3-6. Good!
- Fragmented nature of the sector makes it difficult to move forward, reach agreement.
- The language may be influenced by inspector system- coming from a care background?? Bringing in care or putting it first diminishes... – here 5/6- who is teaching these modules?
- Ownership of the language/terminology/ difficult to shift. This due to its historical tract/minding whilst parents work.

- Brendan Howlin- education needs educators- who are transforming citizens- no mention of early...- constantly searching for recognition from others? Why?
- Possibility of DES/schools changing in light of early years?
- Care permeates/ should permeate actions throughout the State.
- From a children's rights perspective- could the language shift?
- Needs to come from those involved in educating, training etc.
- How EY students are viewed in the population- this needs reconceptualisation as they are often viewed as less. It's important that we find our own language.
- Care and love needs to permeate the sector but we need to educate the problem. But teachers don't have time.
- Empowerment- it's up to us.
- Early Childhood Educators/ Early Years Educators. Which is valid? Isn't teaching a caring profession? There is a tension here around care/ education. Is it time to reclaim our own language?
- Questions: Do we need a common language? And if we decide we do need this, how do we develop same?

In summary

The group amalgamated the three prime questions in their discussion, concluding with two key group questions; Do we need a common language? If we decide we need this, how do we develop same? In arriving at these two questions the discussion group considered the contribution by other education stakeholders (incl., Minister of State) to the recognition and valuing of the contribution made by EY sector in the overall educational arena; the need for actors in the EY sector to have active input and involvement in determining the way forward; recognition of the concept of "care"; and the difficulties surrounding the use of language and terminology, delivery of service sector education and the status of the EY sector.

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children's agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion;

- Clear idea of what a good setting looks like? All the distinct areas are taking away the children's capacity for construction and creativity.
- This is what's being taught and inspected, hence why they are created as such.
- When you over-construct you miss subtle nuances.
- You need very little if you really think about children's creativity?
- Commodification of EY settings- an industry around this. It's about something adult-led.
- Making space for embodied experiences of children. Again from the initial ed., perspective there's a barrier. Notion of control pervades- allow/tell children to do this- hence they are merely reiterating school experience.
- They are also inhibited by parental expectations, regulations, personal school experiences...
- What is needed to empower EY to stand up to other agencies? We need to return to the child again- consider the power dynamic and relationships.
- Adult- child relationships in a box?
- EY educators and carers have been constrained for their entire school career-why are we surprised if they feel inhibited?
- Who do the environments actually work for? HSE? DES?
- Compliance etc., Will only be emphasised in the inspectorate model. This is all bound up in a market driven model.
- What will happen when they go to primary? Are they even more constrained?
- Preschool practitioner/professional has to advocate for their practice.

- We need broader and interdisciplinary research to untangle/deconstruct internal/external constraints that currently define our learning environments.

In Summary

The group did not derive any questions for this session. Their discussion identified a tension within the EY space between regulation, commodification, control, external expectations versus creativity and uncovering subtle nuances as expressed by children. The impact of the market on process within the EY arena was considered as well as the need for those within this sector to research and define their own working/learning environment.

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion;

- Current value of care in society in general is not valued.
- Is the question not how we can value care?
- Not recognised in the education system? This divide doesn't really exist?
- Is there room to begin the deeper parental (?) partnership in settings? Let by the home?
- Macro- needs embedded societal change- how care is valued in Irish society? Discourses around this?
- The forbidden fruit- love and care? Is it located outside the home?
- Is it that professionalism means that caring goes down? Do assistants do this?
- Degree-confer status? Parents and students think it does. Inspectorate etc will engage with people in different ways given their qualifications.
- It should "do something" but what?
- Is there a vested interest on the part of colleges?

- Some of the least qualified are responsible for the most vulnerable. What does professional mean? Is there confusion over paid=professional?
- Occupation meets efficacy.
- Shared understanding is what counts as professionalism?
- CE schemes mean those with no qualifications still feature in the sector.
- ACP-criteria for entry-minimum level 5 initially but now level 6? There will now be different types of work and qualifications to suit. What would be required to generate professional identity within the profession? Including the research?
- Australia and New Zealand- qualification structure is best? Are we afraid of change? What about the workforce development plan?
- ASD units? What's happening with these? Who is teaching there? Who is teaching level5/6? Private companies? Gearing for passing the exams?
- Level of accountability for those with higher qualifications is much less than those with "lesser" – regarded as a technician.
- Who are we? What do we do? Can we self-regulate?
- Conditions are so adverse that good students who graduate are returning to primary education.
- ENOUGH TALK! ACTION ON THIS!!
- It's a very slow process.

In summary

This group discussion identified several questions pertinent to the topic. Four main concerns emerged: care as a concept may not be well regarded within society or by those engaged in administering/inspecting the profession; the professionalism within the sector has led to an increase in credentialisation which could be blurring the importance of the care concept, increasing the amount and levels of qualifications which impacts on behaviour of and to actors in the sector and the administration of curricula in terms of training EY professionals was questioned; willing to accept change within the sector was discussed and finally poor conditions within the EY sector were highlighted as reasons why many leave this sector to engage in the primary education sector.

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion;

- Shit focus: continuum- is this possible?
- Who is joining the dots?
- Parents/pressure from society also impact this?
- Will Ed. Centres ever offer CPD to both teachers and early years educators together?
- Divided community with regard to Aistear in terms of training.
- Attitudes need to change as well. These are so difficult to alter.
- In certain settings they are treated like a lesser being.
- What are the funds of knowledge that we’re looking for? What do the educators expect? Are they taking account of the massive diversity in those funds of knowledge?
- What about Roger Slee and skirting the norm? Is the reason we’re not addressing the various funds of knowledge because we’re reoccupied?
- Deconstructing the norm. Wouldn’t it be brilliant to have joint/cross fertilisation between settings? There’s a hierarchical system there that already exists. When will this happen?
- Using the County Childcare Committee.
- Shared learning days. High level/qualified students/ EY workers are struggling not to submit to the superiority of the teachers.
- Much of the culture needs to be changed first. “Teacherly Behaviours”-EY teachers feel the need to adopt these. Maybe we need to celebrate our strengths too! We’re very hard on ourselves.
- Where are the DCYA in this? We need to activate this?
- A need for a socio- cultural shift that unifies and socialises the education and care discourse right throughout the perceived continuum.
- Should a manifesto be prepared around joining the dots?
- Where is well being –could this be a source of focus? We acknowledge that’s being done but we need substantial progress. Certain sectors have begun this- Aistear in PS, JC reform etc.,

- Are these conversations happening at 3rd level- in courses? Is this being propagated? How can this be further enhanced?

In summary

The group did not formulate specific research questions at the end of this session. This group highlighted the need for a change in attitude (about the EY sector and workers within this sector) both by those outside the sector and those within. The diversity and wealth of knowledge within the sector should be acknowledged and encouraged. Change is necessary. Broadly a socio-cultural shift is required that encompasses education and care discourse.

Additional notes in back of notebook. Aistear is about relationships- a curriculum framework- and not a subject attached to wellbeing. Robert Halpern- Tying education more closely to schooling-perils etc. Toby Wolfe- what is early education-birth to 8? Early childhood? Love? Education? Terminology is a political tool. Moss- investment, high returns and quality discourse- future orientated. Can a history justify a term? Schoolification –ECEE or ECCE? Centres/Services/ Institutions/Multi purpose-public space settings? Includes homes. Practitioner-medical term? Teacher- you need to qualify before using the term in One UK? Teach Out – Danish model- around spaces for learning- institutional and /or environmental. Why is it that educators struggle for professional identity? There isn't a recognition of their professional identity. Hyper feminine- child rearing and can be done by everyone? Social prestige? Conditions of employment? Teachers are endorsed at European level/impoverished? Academic culture? QQI level i does not go far enough. The bar is set very low here. – Audits inspection, training- technical perspective. New Zealand- pathways-100% teacher led by 2012. Vested interest groups? Cheap labour possible. Funds of knowledge? Amazing children. Read document.

Notes from the Purple Group. 2.

Facilitator: Geraldine Nolan

Reporter: Catriona O'Toole

Members: Criona Blackburne, Arlene Foster, Patricia McCaffrey, Maire Mhic Mhathuna, Sandra O'Neill, Catherine Shanahan, Grainne Gannon.

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we access/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Flux. UNCRC- early childhood 0-8.
- Language political tool. Choice of words affects how we think and different images in listener's mind. Sector in flux.
- Boundaries:- Clarity vs e.g. 0-6?, Openness e.g. setting, Educare- perhaps contrived, synthetic.
- Connotations: teacher/childminder.
- Discourses: market, neuroscience, early intervention, technocratic @quality (Peter Moss).
- Political tool: OECD & education divisions, labour market divisions.
- (Meara)Does it matter? Impact, how to measure it.
- Differences here? Why consequences.
- Are we speaking the same language?
- Works both ways- pragmatic, we use it as a political tool to advocate.
- Bottom up- does terminology emerge from practice rather than agendas. Values and connotations in language/terminology.

- Historical context.
- Voices of children-what terms do they use? Call us “teachers”. NB for identity.
- Overlaps in Bed primary & ECCE degree.
- Research question: How do children understand their ECEC setting & practitioners?

In summary

This group came to the conclusion that the sector is in a state of flux, lacking clarity re terms, openness, and, at times, contrived language. They suggest that terminology is influenced by market forces and neuroscience, citing the influence of OECD in education and labour market divisions being evident as a political tool. They debated whether terminology emerges from practice or is contrived through agendas. Reference was made to the use of the word “teacher” by children, and suggested that terms are important for identity. This session culminated in a research question: How do children understand their ECEC setting & practitioners?

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children’s agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion

- Together old and young – EU project.
- Spatial design/physical environment – working for all, children, educators?
- OECD compendium of- across sectors- interdisciplinary approach- spatial design lacking in Irish context (also Darmody).

- 1st 3 years of life. UNESCO globally recognised education, 3-6 also pregnancy and infancy as key.
- Home Learning Environment (EPPE).
- Integrated children centres.
- Global trends: Forrest Schools. Outdoor schooling “UdaScoil= Teach out= getting learning out into the community...
- Human geography (Holloway 2011)- space, place, embodied experience of children.
- Conundrum of play- relinquishing teacher control- Froebel kindergarten vs infant classes (industrial revolution).
- Learning environments, why neglected?- Silos. Power dynamics-teacher control. Expansive view of learning environments.
- Way of thinking: practicalities-rations, garda vetting. Conceptions of childhood- separate from adult activities, needing protection(safety) being disruptive.
- Power dynamics: environment lends itself to relinquishing control. Elitism.
- Constraining and facilitating effects of regulations.
- Bringing community in rather than vice versa.
- Attitudes, re letting go, relinquishing control. Who decided? Consulted children in the design? What’s their ideal?
- What are the barriers and facilitators around learning environs and physical space. Way of thinking. Conceptions of children. How policy and regulation may be barriers. Attitudes? Children consulted?

In Summary

*The group inquired as to whether the design of the physical environment worked for all stakeholders. They discussed examples of early childhood experiences garnered from other countries experiences and from established research. The position and influence of OECD and UNESCO was debated. Power was debated in terms of relationship between teacher and child, elitism and in terms of regulations, garda vetting, for instance. The session drew to a close in formulating the following research questions: Attitudes, re letting go, relinquishing control. Who decided? Consulted children in the design? What’s their ideal?
What are the barriers and facilitators around learning environs and physical space. Way of thinking. Conceptions of children. How policy and regulation may be barriers. Attitudes? Children consulted?*

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion

- Struggle for prof., identity and status (multifaceted). Myth: any[one] women can do it.
- Relational aspects fo the work. Curriculum integration- Aistear signals a continuum (but diversity in approach)
- Disparity in status/conditions.
- Care be elevated?
- Collective thought : professionalization, unionisation/degree confer status? IRE.
- Full integration?
- Discrepancy- children with additional/special needs. Public (civil) sector (here is CPD in service but limited) vs ECCE private/voluntary/community sector. Communication/collaboration.
- Research questions: Exploring the discrepancies/similarities between Early Years + Primary. How does any professional group acquire status, what is it that confers status: Professionalisation, Unionisation, ITE collective strength-identity?
- Pit ECCE against Teacher Ed, Public vs Private/
- Research would be underpinned and a deconstruction of conceptions of care and of caregivers and education being gendered work.
- What's required?

In summary

In this session the group debated the concept of care and whether or not it could be elevated in status. They identified a multifaceted struggle for a professional status and identity, and

regarded as key the necessity to dispel myths around the sector and gender. They highlighted Aistear as being useful in signalling continuum within education whilst allowing for diversity. They suggest the following as a research question: Exploring the discrepancies/similarities between Early Years + Primary. How does any professional group acquire status, what is it that confers status: Professionalisation, Unionisation, ITE collective strength-identity?

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

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Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion (Arlene Foster)

- Transitions. Funds/ resources, shared responsibility.
- Skill sets to enable transition, context- child supported? – relationships.
- Dominance of research on pre-school to primary transition- readiness.
- Interactionist approach. Aistear. Context.
- What are the funds of knowledge- children as active learners, - what are preschools doing for transitions into primary?
- Examples of practices: transition booklet+ parents and children themselves involved.
- ECCE coming together for CPD/training but tension as to status disparity. Aistear as a tool to support alignment of educational experience.

In summary

In this session the group discussed transitions and child readiness in terms of shared responsibility and using funds of knowledge. They highlighted the use of an interactionist approach, Aistear and the importance of context. They suggested that transition booklets which involve the participation of parents and child were useful and highlighted tensions regarding status disparity. They formed the question: What are the funds of knowledge – children as active learners- what are preschools doing for transitions into primary?

Extra in from of notebook: Intro Noirin. Contestation _ Aistear. Play curriculum. Halpern: "losing the present to the future" misunderstanding what provision looks like.

Notes from the Orange Group. 3. (a)

Facilitator: Clare Farrell

Reporter: Josephine Bleach, *Marlene Mc Cormack*

Members: Emma Dineen, Denise Flood, Ciara Ni Bhrion, Margaret O'Donoghue, Patrick Sullivan, Ann Marie Tiernan

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we access/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Different language between sectors. Primary teachers in bubble and ECCE know about changes in the sector.
- Status-use term that gives higher status depending on audience.
- Education sector-more defined and standardised.
- Use of the term "girls". Teachers are never "girls" only child care workers are called girls.
- Need clear communication and meaning. Deal with historical meanings. Term "values" never used- what are the values we don't want to lose?
- Want to keep "care"- relationships and interactions.
- Part of junior infants-doing. Expectations of parents in junior infants-tyranny of workbooks.
- ECCE- not allowed to use work sheets.
- Nori-term is infant and link to junior/senior infants.

- Problem re Naíonra– no inspectorate checking language –qualifications.
- New early inspectorate-same terms and conditions as primary yet inspecting staff who do have much less qualifications and terms and conditions sent.
- Does language matter? Yes!
- How do we measure impact? Emotional response, perceptions-our, examples of (stories?). Parents really matter.
- Montessori= education.
- What’s “Reggio”?
- Montessori –quality. Play ≠ equal learning.
- Need re: educating parents.
- Professionalise sector - ECCE don’t see themselves as professionals even though they have degrees. Don’t have confidence to discuss children with parents and other professionals
- Does it really matter? Yes.
- Word “infant” is unique terminology, is a widespread issue. Distinct language in one sector compared to other. Not speaking same language.
- Questions: (1) Perceptions of parents of language and their impact on choices?(2) Impact on parental involvement-paying fees for services? (3) Impact of free pre schools year?
- Thank you cards etc., declined. Entitlements.
- Need to define the language ourselves before asking others to get involved.

In summary

See report from Marlene McCormack

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children’s agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion;

In Summary

See report from Marlene McCormack.

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion

- How can care be evaluated? Qualifications in ECCE room be required in every room.
- Babies need high qualifications as much older. Need plans to extend qualifications.
- Funding ECCE is now split 0-3, 3-4 rather than 0-4, 4-6.
- CE- should it (?)
- People with degree – hard to keep them motivated, hard to manage.
- Irish- what precedents abroad?
- Higher government investment- top-up salary for a certain amount of money.
- Higher capitation- does it go to staff or keep service afloat? Doesn't pay for local holidays etc.,
- First class honours degree and yet not getting an adequate salary.
- ECCE degree now moving to primary teaching points and both are a vocation. Need people to look at nurses and now have assistants. Skilled people with less qualifications.
- Can't lose care elements.
- Teachers & SNA's. No hierarchy in ECCE.
- Netherlands: higher qualification – mentoring on pedagogy paid at higher level. Regular staff.
- Belgium – ECCE staff paid same as teacher also had care assistants.
- Nursing sector- union and totally funded by governments.
- Professional identity – hierarchy – care-education-public –private.
- Gov subsidises children with –direct payments of salaries.

- Care- what it takes for quality care. 5 hours for 3 hours of quality care.
- Recognition by funders of what is quality?
- Gov not interfering with private sector. So won't pay for non-contact time for planning and preparation and clean up.
- Real mistake to divide education and care.
- We need to define care- physical, emotional, teaching, spiritual.
- We value care but government split care and education. Split care and education, you have less outcomes.
- Des a degree convey status?
- Focus on relationship-children, staff.
- Mentoring piece- ensuring graduates are suitable for employment.
- Value learning over play- professional development is needed to evaluate care.
- Recognition by funders. Professional development-salaries-(?)
- Yes- degree conveys status in terms of perception but not salaries/ concerns what are we doing with degrees.
- Yes- integrated but government needs to take responsibility. Needs to examine roles and responsibility and then assign responsibility.
- Research question: Examine different integrated models throughout the world and then propose one that could work in Ireland.

In summary

The group considered that "care" must be appreciated in professional terms. That quality care has a hidden delivery cost –five hours to provide three hours care. The degree requirements are nearly on par with those of primary teachers yet the working environment and pay is demoralising in terms of professional payback. They also highlighted the need for more visibility of qualifications- suggesting that these be displayed in used rooms. The group discussed the more favourable conditions and practises in other countries and in comparison with nursing. They highlight gaps in funding and pay, payment for some tasks but not for others. They condemn the decision to split care and education. They formed the opinion that more clarity is necessary within the profession, a professional identity is required, with conditions and pay on

par with other similar professionals. They suggest that the government needs to take more responsibility and suggested a research focus: Examine different integrated models throughout the world and then propose one that could work in Ireland.

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion;

In summary

See report from Marlene McCormack.

Notes from the Orange Group. 3. (b)

Facilitator: Clare Farrell

Reporter: Marlene McCormack, *Josephine Bleach*

Members: Emma Dineen, Denise Flood, Ciara Ni Bhrion, Margaret O'Donoghue, Patrick Sullivan, Ann Marie Tiernan

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we access/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Who are we and what are we doing? Early education-who/what/ school/ parent/childminder?
- Birth- 8-
- What perspective are we coming from? Terms set the boundaries. Do you change the terminology or change the thinking?
- Do we reflect public discourse or do we reframe the discussion?
- Does it really matter? What is the impact and how might we measure or assess?
- Are things different here than in other countries?
- Are we all speaking the same language in terms of meaning?
- ecligmit@schoolofedTCD
- Historical. Expectation of parents. Workblocks(?) (being able to read) Expectations and perceptions of parents.
- Working statement: pink: no evidence that there is an impact. Red; terminology does matter. Matters for our identity, values implicit in terminology

-

In summary

This group discussed whether there was a need to change terminology or to change ways of thinking, whether to reflect public discourse or reframe the discussion. They explored the nature of EY in terms of function and the broad array of stakeholders involved. They touched on the topic of comparison with other countries and the historical legacy of EY within the Irish domain. They concluded with a statement: Pink: no evidence that there is an impact. Red; terminology does matter. Matters for our identity, values implicit in terminology

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children's agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion:

- Learning environment that works for who? Inspectors/children/parents?
- Research on spatial design and its impact on children is lacking in Ireland-both in early years and primary.
- Questions: (1) Expand the research base on learning environments in Ireland. Why?(2) Adult/child power dynamics- what contribution could further research on dynamics in EY environments (children's agency)[have]? (3) how might we envision a more expansive view of learning environment?
- Environments tied up to a Market.
- Reporter thoughts- building/environment- built in response to regulations and need. Tight spaces a real issue for primary school. No focus in regulations on outdoor space. Historically all

about buildings-not about the needs of children comes back to history and money for all environments. Look at trends-prefabs (for everyone – homeless and schools) we need to conceptualise space differently. Space tied up with economics. Neglect- lack of money, vision, sticky plasters. Standardised approach- use of prefabs-add on. Square footage- needs to be seriously considered. Planning process-child audit for all spaces. What do we require for children? What are the needs of children in their spaces. How can primary –school environments- allow for art and science. Cross disciplinary approach- regulatory authorities need to do audits/child proofing/ curriculum proofing. Risk in environment. What environments facilitate risk for children. Interrogate relationship between regulatory/ regulations and risk rich environments. Making children’s playing visible in the community- how can we make children’s play visible in the community? Move away from sticky plaster approach values, more collaboration with councils. Reach on what child needs, child and care proofed. Childrens’ voice in the planning of environments. Power dynamics- we focus on adult negative rather than child positives.

- Problem- environments are very much tied up with the market approach and regulations.
- Historically- we fix up-put sticking plasters e.g. proliferation of prefabs (housing, school and early childhood). We need to conceptualise spaces differently.
- Research- links between policy; regulation; planning and values in relation to environments.

In Summary

In this session the group highlight the lack of forward planning and research based building and use of space in learning environments in Ireland. They explored the dynamic within space in the sense of who it was supposed to be working for, (for example, parents, children or inspectors) and the functions that should be encompassed (for example, art, science, play). Reference was made to historical context, to the effect of economics and short term solutions (sticking plasters) that become long term fixes (for example prefabs). They called for a cross disciplinary approach in terms of planning and auditing, to including child proofing and curriculum proofing. From this session they highlighted three questions: (1) Expand the research base on learning environments in Ireland. Why? (2) Adult/child power dynamics- what contribution could further research on dynamics in EY environments (children’s agency)[have]? (3) How might we envision a more expansive view of learning environment?

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion;

- How can care be elevated? Does a degree confer status? Is everybody worthy of being called a professional? Should we have full integration of ECCE and why?
- Discussion: (1)concern with babies suggestion-qualifications should be required for all age ranges of children.
- (2)Pay and conditions. Hard to keep staff motivated when they have a degree and are on a minimum wage.
- (3) Is there something to be learned from the “Nursing” sector.
- Research: What can we learn from other sectors, markets (e.g. nursing)?
- Qualified- you pay more (e.g. electrician registered with RECI)
- Government will subsidise places with higher qualifications (as in other jurisdictions)
- Staff paid by government but owned by private sector(same as school-teachers paid by DES but schools are owned by parish or school of management.)
- For care to be elevated- care needs to be valued. (government needs to give higher levels of funding into the sector – now- contact) Care needs to be better understood (misperception of the value of play and care) Introduce CPD- this will elevate care (&valuing of care).

In summary

In this session the group reviewed the concept of “care” in terms of how to raise the importance of the surrounding the concept. They explored professionalism in terms of how wide the net of the term professional should be, suggested that qualifications should be in place for those dealing with all ages ranges including babies. They discussed the need for appropriate attention to be given to pay and conditions and emphasised how demoralising it is to have a degree and work for minimum wage. They suggested that the section could learn something from looking at other sectors (for example nursing, registered electricians) and how they conduct their qualifications and remuneration structure, and

highlighted the fact that the Government will pay subsidies to places with higher qualifications. They concluded with two points: learn from the experience of other sectors, and care needs to be valued and given higher levels of funding. They suggest introducing CPD to assist in the latter.

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion;

- Need to bring pre-school and primary schools together
- (1) Funds of knowledge: How can we shift our focus re ready children
- (2) How can we build better relationships between the home, ECCE setting and primary school contexts.
- (3) Curr./Pedagogy: How can engagement a Aistear be better supported.
- Q.- Funds of knowledge. How is information transferred systematically and consistently- (the crèche-knows so much about the child)- teachers wanting to start fresh. Do not want child labelled.
- Curriculum and Pedagogy: Aistear should be rolled out- primary and pre-school together (models-docklands/WEXAI Ballyfermot) Build on good examples and what we know.
- Continuity of Environment: early childhood alignment (?) we need to recognise agendas. Economic agenda- teachers needing to hold numbers (hold teacher).
- Alternative styles of junior school (how can we have environments ready, standard build?)
- Community spaces (one needed) where pre-school and primary children can meet. Shared spaces.
- (Think about transitions/Aistear) Across community setting- spaces for multiple settings to come together. Transitions- Systematic, Consistent, Multi-directional. Utilising Aistear as a common mechanism. Feature- Environments, Uniforms, Funds of Knowledge, (Growing up ritual).
- Concept of “readiness”- need for ed. Institutions to be ready. Increasing the school starting age. Environment. Reconceptualised primary schools.
- Rec - 11 subjects in primary school and language. Future(?)

- Aistear-language and numbers- language and new numeracy curr. (no opportunity to integrate).
- Will and Openness and Integration and Resources.
- Concepts Up- (?) up. Concepts Down- (?) - (?) down.
- Research- examples of good practise. Home-Setting-School. Real face-to-face relationships are most important.

In summary

Resulting from this session the group highlighted the usefulness of Aistear as a tool to influence change, especially in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy. They identified specific aspects of transitions (systematic, consistent, multi-directional and features(environments, uniforms, funds of knowledge, growing up rituals) that they regarded as important. The issue of “readiness” and the responsibility for readiness was discussed together with the need to build better, more integrated relationships between pre-school and primary school sectors. Examples of good working models were discussed. The need for face to face relationships was emphasised. A particular question formed was: How is information transferred systematically and consistently- (the crèche-knows so much about the child)- teachers wanting to start fresh. Do not want child labelled.

Extras in notebook

www.eclairnement.ie- A single research Q over the day. Style research statement.

Aim: pull together. Contesting some of the taking for granted assumptions. Language and budget- cuts to ed. (childcare quota is sorted by the budget) critique each other. Challenge each other’s assumptions. Noirin-Ob. Aistear-galvanising(?) to play h&W, Aistear as a curriculum, all about relationships, ped. Reform and “over emphasis on play”. Robert Halpern (2013) Tying EC ed to primary education. Aligning Primary & EC. Many posters- extended time frame. Problems- More opening for downward pressure- less early childhood life. Losing the present to the future, misunderstanding what provision looks like.

Notes from the Light Blue Group

Facilitator: Meera Oke

Reporter: Roisin McGlone

Members: Judith Butler, Geraldine Doran, Siobhan Fogarty, Fiona Giblin, Judy Irwin, Deirbhile Ni Craith, Bridie Thronton, Ruth Black.

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we access/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Who are we? What are we doing? Language “embedded”.
- Childcare- education depends on educators
- Sector in flux, multifaceted perspectives- boundaries, connotation, discourse, political tool.
- Worry less about institutions- “open” ended term/ new “new” term “educare”- dominant discourse- market, neuroscience, investment, quality- dominant discourse- technocratic. Return public discourse.
- Infant-used language.
- We are in the process of change- professionalisation- impact of parents- (?) term is educator.
- Scope- hierarchy.
- Reflect back- questions. (1) Does it really matter? Parents/ Educators/ Politicians- Impact, Measure, Inspect.
- (2) Are things affected here- why? Consequences.
- (3) Are we speaking the same language? School-Preschool.

In summary

This group called for a return to public discourse, suggesting that language in this sector was embedded and driven by market and neuroscience discourse. They highlight that the sector is in the process of change and that language plays a part in this. They raised three questions:

(1) Does it really matter? Parents/ Educators/ Politicians- Impact, Measure, Inspect.

(2) Are things affected here- why? Consequences.

(3) Are we speaking the same language? School-Preschool.

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children's agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion

- Learning environment, Netherlands- international child development, (?)
- Together Old and Young- EU project, Fuji- Kinder Toy.
- Renaissance in Kinder achievements
- Challenge:- making space work for all children, all parents, educators, policy-makers.
- 41cm run on roof/spanality (?)/ solar gain/natural light, outdoor –indoor correct dress, need for research in Ireland
- ESRI- researchers- primary – ECCE.
- Harvard Centre for child development.
- UNESCO: pre-(1) priority(designing for Early Years), (2) Neuroscience- 0-3 formal(?), (3) Integrated family support + ECEC under one roof, (4) Broader word- learning environment:-

outdoors, lifelong and lifewide, “wider outdoor”- public . Reconnecting children with outer worlds, intergenerational, “Teach Out”, outdoor school teacher (Denmark).

- Getting learning out in the community.
- Focus on wellbeing of users. “liveable”- human geography_ “making space for embodied experiences of children” Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson.
- “Clash of the culture”- “Aistear “ “Giving up control”
- Adult- child- learning environment. What accounts for its neglect?
- (1) What is necessary to stimulate future research?
- (2) Adult/child power dynamics- children’s agency- contribution,_ knowledge about children’s agency,- continuity of terms across ECEC and Primary.
- (3) How might? Imaginary learning environment beyond home, school, ECEC. What contribution : interdisciplinary addresses the challenges and opportunities?

In Summary

Comparison was made with International examples. The call was made for more research to be done in this area with reference made to UNESCO’s guidelines. A challenge was identified in terms of making space work for all stakeholders in addition to engaging with the community. Aistear was identified in terms of a clash of culture and giving up control. This group devised three research questions: (1) What is necessary to stimulate future research?

(2) Adult/child power dynamics- children’s agency- contribution, _ knowledge about children’s agency,- continuity of terms across ECEC and Primary?

(3) How might? Imaginary learning environment beyond home, school, ECEC. What contribution : interdisciplinary addresses the challenges and opportunities?

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion

- Who, What is preferred?
- Gender. Knowledge. Qualification. Integrated systems. Vested interests.
- Terminology, Learning Environment, Prd, Transitions.
- How can care be elevated?
- Does a degree confer status?
- Should we have full integrated ECCE ? Why?How?
- Is everybody working due a title?

In summary

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion

- What do we want from our children? – I am happy, valued, respected .
- Lis Brodcer/ Us Broader- Home to Preschool.

In summary

Extra from front of book: Interdisciplinarity of EECE- theorise more thoroughly,- compartmentalising- what is ECCC? Contestations –disputations. Comfortable in challenging colleagues “lens”. Pedagogical reform. Robert Halpern 2013,Less “early childhood life”, “losing the present to the future.”

Notes from the Yellow Group. 5.

Facilitator: Deidre McGrath

Reporter: Liz Dunphy, *Orla Mc Kiernan*.

Members: Deborah Clarke, Karen Higgins, Jones Irwin, Louise Kinlen, Kay O'Sullivan, Jan Petterson,

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we assess/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Terminology does matter! Terminology affects parental perspective on the value/purpose of early ed., and care.
- We need a shared understanding of the terms: early childhood, early childhood educational development.
- How can we come together around values and principles that lead to terms as opposed to terminology determining who we are!

In summary

This group did not formulate a specific research question from this discussion. Overall they regarded that the terminology was important. It affects the interpretation of parents as to the value placed on early education and care. They identified the need to work at arriving at a shared understanding of this sector and establish terms in this manner rather than having terminology thrust upon it.

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children's agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion

- Our understanding of a child growing (?) and how this can be developing across the education and care sources and the wider community.
- How in future can we recognise/facilitate/foster the agency of children in early learning groups, environment? Environment for groups?

In Summary

For this session the group focused on developing our understanding of the growing child within education, care and the community. They highlighted the need to identify the agency of children in early learning groups and the community and to foster a broader relationship and understanding within the wider community.

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion

- Difficulty with question of “how can care be elevated?” – problem with separating care and education. Why does care have lower status?
- Gender element.
- Need for “care” also in the teaching profession. Undervaluing of care, some courses at 3rd level have dropped “care” to gain status. Others have kept it as a political argument.
- Care has different elements e.g. nappy changing, feeding etc., or holistic wellbeing.
- Should we invent new terms or go back to basics?
- Theoretical elements of ECC courses- but that is not perceived outside.
- If care needs to be elevated- must be down there. Nursing/medical professions have are element- but not in their job title.
- CAO points demand led- but also professionalisation Level 8 has overall parity of academic standard.
- Need to raise professional levels.
- Does everyone need a degree?
- Research in ECEC settings in UK- pre service framing essential. Cannot be learnt just from watching others- need to understand.
- Level 5 FETAC may not tech that “why” element.
- Privatisation vs Public sector.
- Unskilled workers- lack of understanding- still some shocking scenarios.
- Affordability of all having level 7 & *.
- What about childminders?
- Folk beliefs about childrearing.
- Discussion on State’s responsibility and caring for children.
- Urban/rural divide – logistics- what is available.
- Class divide, equity.
- Parents- what do they want? Unsure they are hung up on degree level. But they have limited expectations.
- Maybe look more at FETAC courses and their standardisation.
- Internationally research shows higher mandatory education increases quality. Skill very low in Ireland.

- No management training.
- Purpose of higher education is to prepare you mentally.
- What is there role? Assumed level of care?
- On the job training, mentoring, need for reflective practice.
- Managers focus on breaking even, making profit.
- Need to work with where we are. What is our idea of a professional? If sector wants to professionalise, need to draw boundaries. Same issue arose in teaching 40-50 years ago. Not everyone is a professional care worker- not everyone equipped to do that as it stands.
- Majority (not all) in favour of requiring all early childhood professionals to have level 7-8.

In summary

This group identified problems around the status of the concept of “care”, the separation of “care” and “education”, the dropping of the term in some cases to enhance status of degree course, and the retention in other cases as a contribution to a political agenda. There was debate as to the content of educational training courses at various levels, and discussion generally regarding the need for attention to be paid to professional and academic standards. Features of other disciplines were discussed (nursing/ medical professionals) for comparison, in addition to reflecting on international research in the field. The need for all to have a degree was discussed together with comment on the fact that higher mandatory education increased quality. The notion of childminder and how they fitted into this sector and the professional debate was touched upon. Divisions between public-private, social class, urban-rural were identified. Overall this group felt that the issue of professionalism needs to be addressed and most felt that qualifications at level 7-8 were necessary for all early childhood professionals.

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

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Points of discussion

- Psycho-social, psycho-educational readiness?
- Age of transition might need to be looked at. Other countries- academic age is 6+.
- School readiness discourse somewhat outdated.
- Key issue is the pedagogy they are exposed to .
- Problem with one size fits all- is there an optimal point/age for transition?
- Teachers in primary schools move classes therefore may not be familiar with Aistear. Maybe Aistear CPD should be compulsory for existing primary teachers.
- The “wash out” effect in schools for new teachers going in- fitting in with school culture.
- Aistear training should be mandatory.
- Making transitions: staff- pupil ratio is critical to this in the primary schools. Very difficult for teachers to manage individual or small groups.
- Teacher has to trust the agency of the child and be more facilitative rather than didactic.

In summary

How to gage the readiness of the child in psycho-social and psycho-educational was discussed with issues being identified as the age of transition, pedagogy, and outdated school readiness discourse. Staff-pupil ratios, the needs of new teachers fitting in to an already established school culture were identified as problematic areas. The group didn't form a specific research question, but suggested that Aistear training should be mandatory and that teachers must be more trusting of the agency of the child.

Notes from the Yellow Group. 5. b? (notebook unsigned, possibly Orla McKiernan)

Facilitator: Deidre McGrath

Reporter, *Orla Mc Kiernan*, : Liz Dunphy

Members: Deborah Clarke, Karen Higgins, Jones Irwin, Louise Kinlen, Kay O’Sullivan, Jan Petterson,

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we assess/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Yes terminology matters, power around it, status, separate out- EC?
- 0-6/0-8 conceptual/structured separation. Balance between care and education- nurturing and pedagogy?
- Curriculum- resistance to the use of the term – moved to an openness. Term “teacher” being used in pre-school.
- Power and status associated with certain terms, evolution of terms.
- Who is using the terminology, e.g. children.
- Traditional view, anyone can start a pre-school.
- Vet cares for (?) needs more points.
- Service, childcare – is core, but like social care is perceived as low level.
- Does matter. Pedagogical guide as practice guide:- qualifications, viewed by society, policy vs practice.
- Call teacher, call Mom, not Miss. School- call Ms/M-. Nice piece of research to see what children call adult.

- School readiness research;_ ECCE scheme changed their role. –“pre-school” preparation- for a system ok in terms of parents_ don’t sell it. Selling message to parents. Impacts on the view of the sector.
- Language dis-empowers people working in the sector. Disillusioned / disempowered- knock on impact on children. Feel-isolated, marginalised, investment.
- Does matter, not speaking same language. Other countries e.g. N.Z.- teaching and education (resistance in Ireland).
- Children’s view of adult- research from children’s perspective on adult in setting,
- Look at sector- what are we calling ourselves and why, what do we want to be called?Parent?
- Look at the different perspectives- child, parent, sector.
- What does 4audit mean- linked to market?
- Question: Research needed on different perspectives- child parent, those working in sector.

In summary

This group decided that terminology definitely mattered and discussed the topic in terms of power, evolution of terms, resistance to some (e.g. Curriculum) and usage of others (e.g. teacher). They highlighted the separation of the terms “care” and “education” and suggested that care, childcare is perceived at a low level. It was suggested that language dis-empowers people working in this sector and this has can have a knock-on effect on children. They discussed the fact that the role of the ECCE scheme has changed and it is seen as pre-school preparation. They also raised the usage of market terminology. The session formulated the following question/research focus: What are we calling ourselves and why, what do we want to be called? Research needed on different perspectives- child parent, those working in sector.

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children’s agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion

- Home based CC. Blueprint in primary school – architects invited to give ideas- most standard. EOCP- very standard.
- Focus on functional space- less focus on aesthetic, protection of children, sterile, level of safety, regulations impact on design.
- Litigation fear, bubble wrapping children.
- Some fabulous new preschools and schools
- Why lack of research- lack of connection between designers and end users.
- Influencing policy- powerful to see impact on environment of learning and development.
- Prefab versions purpose built.
- Beauty of aesthetics, funding and little emphasis on it.
- Tokyo- how to account for where children are. Norway- don't have same level of fear. Do we need to know exactly where child is? (protective)
- Lack of understanding of role. Accountability- e.g. bruise- how did it happen?
- Regulation and litigation,- health and safety- won't challenge it. HSE- afraid to challenge it. Research would show evidence.
- Increasing diversity in services e.g. outdoor pre-schools.
- PSSO's have power. Power dynamics between adult and regulatory- big impacts on the environment of the child. Parents and risk. If I had a magic wand?
- Children questioning the boundaries- blurring the boundaries, home, setting, sector, community. Impact of regulation on environment.
- Look at those who have done different things. Tree and sand.
- Research questions: (1) Impact of regulation on the environment. (2) case studies of people who have done different things with some reg. framework. (3) Environment- boundaries, environment, communal spaces, community. (4) layout, organisation, things you provide/don't provide, purpose of what you do.

In Summary

This group discussed the contribution of architects to designing space, and the impact of regulation and fear of litigation as boundaries within this sector. They suggested that poor spatial design was due to the emphasis on function rather than aesthetic and lack of meaningful consultation between users and designers.. They highlighted the weighty influence of regulation and litigation on practice, the broad reach of “health and safety” and the fear of challenging this. They noted that propensity to “bubble wrap” children. They discussed other alternatives and practice in other countries. They derived the following research questions/focus: (1) Impact of regulation on the environment. (2) case studies of people who have done different things with some reg. framework. (3) Environment-boundaries, environment, communal spaces, community. (4) layout, organisation, things you provide/don’t provide, purpose of what you do.

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion

- Uni versus EC.- to get pg is difficult. – education, research. – care- hard to measure.
- What’s looked for in evidence is what focus is on- mental well-being. – J.C.- focus on well-being,. Primary – more discussion on embedding well-being. Care, identity, well-being, emphasise it.
- Holistic.
- Birth – 3 – needs global measures. Certain types of research could drive it.
- Reducing obesity, act as lever for politicians. Identifying special educational needs- early interventions. Educate parents and society. Where do their views come from.
- NZ- option for parents to be in a setting. Nordic countries- cultural value on early childhood.
- What research tools are in use- e.g. in preparing for life. Tools to measure the way that ECCE can help children. How to measure a nurturing pedagogy- focus on holistic development.

- Working in a more integrated way. Sharing More interaction for parents- value all learning equally. – comparing with professional changes in other sectors, e.g. nurses- careful not to lose care in favour of academic knowledge-what went well- learning lessons from other sector.
- Degree:- parents listen more, but for the sector it doesn't have impact you think it will.
- Status:- no impact on pay. Degree there since 1994.
- ECCE degree not viewed as a valuable as primary teaching degree. Degree can cause split-graduate in charge for ECCE funding displacing staff.
- Transitioning –e.g. NT- B.ED degree. Comparing experience of other fields- element of status but remuneration does not follow.
- Q3- worthy of the title of professional. – what do you mean by professional? Degree gives part knowledge and skills.
- SNA- no qualifications needed.
- Model framework basic, advanced etc. Practitioner term covers everyone – Master of what you are doing. Expectation of having something.
- Higher knowledge- base- have to have a certain standard- expert knowledge- minimum standards-need distinctions. Qualifications, registration, C.P.D.- e.g. Doctors.- fragmented voices- fight for improvements- one voice.
- Could be differentiations, diff., levels off status related to training, experience etc.,
- What's your role
- Same child at 3 /4 in private sector or 4/5 in state funded.
- Q4- full integration. More similarities than differences. Yet set up as 2 split systems. Prof. status/identity of teachers versus ECCE sector outside of school.
- Disrespect , disregard for EC sector- different terminology but values, similarity, different contexts, different regulatory systems etc.,
- Split system- 0-3 getting lost, 3+ getting integrated. Long term project 3-5 moving towards education. Will birth- 3 follow?

In summary

See : Liz Dunphy (yellow group)

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion

- Parents should be involved- ready parents too. Parents more involved than ever before. Middle class children going to school at 5.
What do parents understand by school readiness. School readiness, report, worrying (? I). Light version of JI curriculum- some pre-schools.
- Task to be done in changing expectations of parents. Market driven sector to provide what parents want. Not in best interest of children.
- Being professional to articulate the vision for children.
- Q2.- NCCA literacy and numeracy- suite of resources to support transition to primary school.- better communication needed.- requirement of the future. – need equal respect. – small scale schemes-e.g. naonari/ gaelscoil research.
- Must include parents from start.
- Kilkenny education centre- book on transition.
- Siblings informing what will happen- 10/15 feeder preschools- hard to manage. Communication, respect.
- Promotion for teacher to move out of J.I. least respected in school.
- Don’t know who teacher is going to be- local projects, very dependent on attitude of teacher.
- More involvement and collaboration with parents. Communication between pre and primary- sharing of ideas needed.
- Q3.- Joint training. Curriculum perspective- 99 curriculum. NCCH- redevelopment project- phased approach.
- Language curriculum no.1. maths next- ideas, principles of Aistear will be embedded in curriculum. Teachers using Aistear at present have a curriculum that is already set out subject based curriculum. Should the curriculum for Junior and Senior Infants look different?
Recognising curriculum in primary schools is going to change.

- NEYAI-Joint training- different expectations. St. Pat + Mary I- no joint lectures etc., New DES inspectors. CPD essential.
- Parents- understanding of school readiness. Understanding of free ECCE year.
- Children’s perspectives- curriculum- consensus of what learning should look like 0-6/8. Continuum- supporting each child where they are and bringing the on.- Where are they in their learning- (?) skill set. Relationship – yet class of 1:30.
- Play home lends to teaching in a different way.
- How is Aistear being used in different environments and what input is it having? What makes schools engage in Aistear? – principals, teacher, interest in early education.- older teachers from 1971 curriculum came back- going back to what is right for children. Needs catalyst to drive it. Needs national roll out.

In summary

The group began this session by discussing parents and the need for parents to be ready too, therefore they needed to understand what is meant by the term “school readiness”. They highlighted the influence of the market on driving expectations and suggested that this might not be in the best interest of children. They discussed NCCA literacy and numeracy schemes, as an example of practice involved in transitioning to primary school and used this as an example as to why better communication is needed between sectors to support transitions. They discussed the status of early years teaching in terms of a teacher being moved from J.I. being seen as a promotion, thus the working in the junior levels had the least respect in the school. In terms of training, they believed that joint training would be advantageous, but that this was not happening in two third level institutions: St Pats or Mary Immaculate. They debated aspects of the curriculum, and highlighted the success of local projects resting on the readiness of the attitude of the teacher. They arrived at the following research questions: How is Aistear being used in different environments and what input is it having? What makes schools engage in Aistear? – principals, teacher, interest in early education.- older teachers from 1971 curriculum came back- going back to what is right for children. Needs catalyst to drive it. Needs national roll out.

Notes from the Pink Group. 6.

Facilitator: John Kane, Orla Walsh

Reporter: Jacqueline Fallon

Members: Aoife Cooney, Declan Kelleher, Marie Gibbons, Joanne McHale, Jacqui Quinn, Glenda Walsh,.

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we assess/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Who are we? What are we doing?
- Boundaries, connotations, discourses, Political tool.
- Terminology of: stage of child, the field, settings, educators.
- Does it really matter? Impact, How to assess/measure impact.
- Are things different here? Ireland v other countries. Consequences.
- Are we all speaking the same language? School, pre-school divide.
- Duty of care in primary teaching. Is there no care in Education? What is the image of the child as a learner that the adult has? Lack of consensus contributes to flux.
- Outcome of discussion
- We have no empirical evidence of the impact of terminology among parents, educators, service providers, students, policy makers, children and the wider range of stakeholders.
- What impact, if any does the terminology have on the perceptions of stakeholders vis a vis the provision of training and provision of services.

In summary

This group used questions to generate discussion. They concluded that there is need for evidence based information on the impact of terminology and perceptions regarding the impact of terminology across a broad range of stakeholders.

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children's agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion;

- M. Kernan- environments- Question- What knowledge and understanding do architects involved in designing spaces for young children have of (ECE) early learning, children's preferences for the spaces they occupy: e.g. of play?

In Summary;

This group formulated a specific research question from this discussion. They framed the question to raise the issue of the nature of architects' knowledge of ECE and the extent to which this impacts on design.

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion

- Dept of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies. How can care be elevated? Does a degree confer status? Is everyone working with young children worthy of the title “professional”. Should we have full integration of ECCE and why/how?
- Outcome of discussion
- How can care be elevated? – Goes back to our first discussion re: the relationship between education and care.
- Privatisation of ECE outside schools is the crux of the issue- total agreement on this. Investment.
- Questions/Statements: The ECCE sector should be funded on the same basis as the primary and secondary sector. Those with level 5 &6, how do graduates (level 5 &6) working in ECCE sector articulate their career aspirations and their aspirations for the development of the sector? Voice of the professionalism.

In summary

The group devised questions to promote discussion with concerns regarding professions and professional dominating this session . The valuing of “care” provoked debate in terms of how the concept could be elevated within the educational arena. Professionalism and the reach of same was debated in terms of the extent to which care of young children could be considered professional, in addition to considering the status that is assumed to accompany a degree. The group were firmly of the belief that privatisation of ECE outside of the school system was the crux of the present issue, and called for funding of the sector on par with that of the primary and secondary sector. They also raised concerns as to how graduates were able to express themselves in terms of career and sector development at the current time.

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion

- Questions: How do the following articulate their role in supporting the child’s transition into the school: School Principal, Board of Management, Parents, Jnr & Snr Inf Teachers, Pre-school provider, Pre-school professionals.

In summary

This group formulated a specific question: How do the following articulate their role in supporting the child’s transition into the school: School Principal, Board of Management, Parents, Junior & Senior Infant Teachers, Pre-school provider, Pre-school professionals?

Notes from the Navy Group (7)

Facilitator: Sinead Matson, Rita Melia

Reporter: Joan Kiely

Members: Mel Duffy, Gina Cullen, Geraldine French, Grainne Kent, Leah O'Toole, Marie Russell

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we assess/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q3. Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion:

- Who are we? What are we doing? How might terminology matter?
- Boundaries - Clear/unclear?
- Connotations – childcare v early education.
- Peter Moss: dominant discourse is future orientated, technocratic. Discourses- market, neuroscience, investment-high returns, quality, rights. Prevention/Early interventions.
- Political tool. Early education. Investment.
- Reform v Public Discourses. Our words are embedded in ways of thinking.
- Investment v Expenditure. Stages of childhood. Terms - Issues. UNCRC says EC= 0-8years.
- Record your EC alignment @School of Education, TCD.
- Toby's paper captures essence of our problem/dilemma. Terminology is important. How we define ourselves is how we are perceived. Problem is embedded in our culture and policy. People in the field don't know what to call themselves.
- Most Irish children are with childminders. 70% +...
- ECI's update on the budget- conflicting terminology there too.

- “Early Education and Care” hereinafter called “Child Care”...
- Connaught Early Years Educators. Sector naming themselves.
- 2007 Amelie Gambeti- didn’t like the word “practitioners” divorces theory from practice.
- Re early childhood educators. “ even when you are advertising a position, you don’t know how to advertise” (Early Years Educators). Mary Kane-14 different titles.
- Terminology must be accessible to parents.
- Parents education is NB.
- Infant care has changed so much since the ‘70s.
- What do we mean by play?
- Public campaign. Parents need information in campaign . Play-education
- 70% of children “minded” by childminder. School has changed. School readiness- outdated.
- Emergentism is in.
- Suggestion: common foundational programme at university. Diversity after 2 years: ECE/Primary/Secondary.
- Consensus around the word “Education” and “Educator”
- Statement: the word “Educator” found the most consensus in the group.
- The challenge is to find a term that will be acceptable to all groups of professionals and still be broad enough not to “stymie” any group.

In summary

This group formed the opinion that terminology was key to this topic, holding the view that discourse influenced cognition. They highlighted the impact of market orientated and neuro-scientific language permeating discourse surrounding education, as well as lack of agreed terminology within the sector to describe accurately, for example, specific job opportunities. Also emphasised was the change in childcare and infant care since the ‘70s with over 70% of children being cared for by childminders. There has been an accompanying change in terms of function- school readiness is seen as replaced by emergentism. The need for clarity in terms of sector relationship with parents and public was discussed in addition to reflecting on the education provided within the third level sector for potential educators. Overall, attention was paid to vagueness in this sector regarding boundaries, play, function, recognition by parents and public

of aspects of this sector, and the need to adopt appropriate terminology to best describe nature and function of sector and employees within sector. This group did not conclude with a specific research but suggested that : “The challenge is to find a term that will be acceptable to all groups of professionals and still be broad enough not to “stymie” any group.”

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland- what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children’s agency- What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q3. How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q4. What contribution would an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion;

- Learning environments that work (for who?).
- Space-NB to work for all users.
- Fuji kindergarten Tokyo. Circular roof no boundaries between indoors and outdoors. Trees in building.
- Interdisciplinary approach (NB) not usual in Ireland (Cultural and historical – post colonial??)
- Global trends: refocus 0-3 years.
- Harvard Uni., site-(Neuroscience)
- Home learning environment- T Melhuish (?) has more impact than school learning environment.
- Supporting parents – integrated family support.
- Broader view of learning environments, libraries, farms, multigenerational spaces.
- Danish UDOSCHOLE teaching outside of school institution.
- Field trips not happening as they should in primary school.
- “liveable in” spaces.
- “Embodied experience of children” (Holloway and ?.W)
- Play and children’s learning: Ingrid Pramlia Samuelson.

- Romantic label of ECE
- Environmental constraints on the implementation of play in classrooms
- For discussion (1) what accounts for neglect of proper/appropriate space and what is necessary to stimulate research in the area. (2) Research on power dynamics. What could further research on power dynamics make to our knowledge and agency (children's). (3) Learning Environments of the Future: expansive view of learning environments. Public and community spaces.
- Learning environments. Neglect. Who built them? History and culture caused neglect. Child on periphery- now moving towards the centre.
- Space between educators and architects. NO conversation. Children not consulted. Consultation works. Space is a fait d'accompli in primary sector.
- Lack of knowledge by architects?
- NB. Restricted by finance?
- Attitude towards children- from periphery to centre. They are only taking their space now.
- Priority of inspectors conflicts with priorities of educators
- Risky play is not done now.
- Sometimes you are given a pre-made space. It's about re-modelling it. Space in Termonbarry- beautiful
- Lack of commitment to early childhood sector.
- Qualifications levels are changing.
- Educational content was seen to be more important than space.
- Lack of softness/cosiness.
- Why is there not more research on space? Connecting between play as a space and play as a methodology.
- Process of education. It's about the education of the sector.
- Lack of imagination.
- Question/statement: Interdisciplinary and consultation with children/parents/educators/architects. What are the obstacles that are preventing [this]?

In Summary

The group reflected on the lack of interdisciplinary collaboration between professionals and stakeholders in designing learning environments for children. Examples of practices in other countries were discussed. The need to extend the concept of learning environments to include family and a broader array of environments was discussed. The focus on content rather than space and imaginative uses of spaces was emphasised. Questions that were formed: 1) what accounts for neglect of proper/appropriate space and what is necessary to stimulate research in the area? (2) Research on power dynamics. What could further research on power dynamics make to our knowledge and agency (children's)? (3) Learning Environments of the Future: expansive view of learning environments. Public and community spaces. (4) what are the obstacles that prevent consultation between children/parents/ educators/ architects?

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

Q1. Does a degree confer status?

Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?

Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?

Points of discussion;

- Professional identity in ECCE. Dispelling the myth that “anyone can do it”.
- Why do educators struggle with professional identity? Gender. Knowledge and skills. Qualifications-level 5 minimum. Integrated systems. Vested interests.
- Care is devalued=mothering care, women’s work.
- Aistear- nurturing, pedagogy, knowledge of philosophy, sociology and neuroscience (Morsesa Duigan)
- T.ED- 470-500 points. ECE-260-390 points.
- Discussion around definition of a professional A professional –guided by Siolta &Aistear.
- Big difference between level 5 and level 6. There is a hunger in the sector.
- What is the definition of an EC professional?

- How can the EC sector meet the requirements demanded of a professional? i.e. code of ethics, professional standards, minimum qualifications, professional organisation, salary.
- How do EC educators see themselves?
- Do EC educators see themselves as professionals?
- Statement: What is needed of the system to put the infrastructure in place for the professionalization of early childhood educators?
- EC system is monitored a lot by inspections, new guidelines from Siolta and Aistear so there is a lack of trust in the sector.
- Set of standards. Circular argument- money-qualifications-practice.
- Oppressed by inspections if the system had degree qualifications.

In summary

In this session the group emphasised the need for increased clarity regarding the professionalism of this sector from educators themselves, public and associated stakeholders. Education of actors within the sector and requirements thereof was discussed. There was a feeling that overall there was a lack of trust in the sector fuelled by the monitoring processes and guidelines from Siolta and Aistear. The group formed many discussion questions but posed a particular question for future research: What is needed of the system to put the infrastructure in place for the professionalisation of early childhood educators?

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion;

- Skill sets. If we focus only on skill sets, we lose sight of the context.
- Stronger research focus for looking at pedagogy in the infant classes.
- Readiness should be the responsibility of the institution, not the child.
- Aistear supports transitions and alignment. Joint education experiences for the two is nb (teachers and EC educators)
- 1) ready children to ready children and ready settings.
- 2) Home, EC setting and school relationships. Greater coherence and alignment.
- 3) Aistear has: How can Aistear better support engagement in pre-school and primary sector?
- Local solutions (1) Opportunities to spend a day in one another's settings (EC practitioners and teachers), (2) Night for parents about what happens in EC setting and in school. (3) common 3rd level education for teachers and EC educators, e.g. both groups do a common foundation course, then branch into area of preference/expertise, (4) Aistear and Siolta training- do it together,.
- Systemic solutions Implementation of Aistear to all sectors. EC educators and teachers to work with children aged 0-8 years. Integrate schools and EC settings. Teaching Council accreditation for EC degrees.
- Private setting owners in the group say they would be happy to sell their buildings to the State in return for a State salary.
- Questions: (1) how can we radically align the early years and primary sector to create a seamless educational experience for the birth to 6 cohort? (2) What might a public /private partnership between sectors look like in terms of this alignment? (3) What steps does the sector need to take to become unionised?

In summary

In this session the group considered the focus on developing skill sets rather than context, suggesting that the focus should be less on the child's readiness and more on the institution's contribution to that state of readiness. The group highlighted the need for more coherence between EC setting and EC educators, schools and home and identified Aistear as being well placed in supporting engagement in pre-school and primary sectors. They made suggestions as

to how this might be achieved; shared third level foundation level as part of third level studies, opportunities to participate in each other's alternative professional setting and education of parents. Questions concluding this session: 1) how can we radically align the early years and primary sector to create a seamless educational experience for the birth to 6 cohort? 2) What might a public /private partnership between sectors look like in terms of this alignment? 3) What steps does the sector need to take to become unionised?

Additional information in front of notebook

Prof. M. Shevlin. www.ecalignment.ie Halpern-Noirin Hayes. Extended time frame. Complex view of child. Balance: teacher led and child led. Pre-K to 3rd. Readiness perspective is gone from schools. We have emergent approach now.

Notes from the Red Group

Facilitator: Máire Corbett

Reporter: Rose Murphy

Members: Pat O'Connor, Caroline, Margaret O'Donohue, Anne Looney, Ian McKenna, Theresa, Karen, Celina McCoy, Aoife

Does Terminology Matter? Toby Wolfe

Q1. Does it really matter? What is the impact? How might we assess/measure the impact?

Q2. Are things different here? Why differences between Ireland & other countries? What are the consequences?

Q.3 Are we speaking the same language? Is there a school/preschool divide in use & meaning of terms?

Points of discussion;

- The use of terminology matters and is closely linked to the sense of identity of the users of the various terms
- Terminology is used by the various stakeholders to maintain and distinguish position; There may be need for hierarchy to maintain and distinguish position & level of standard
- Language matters to people as it describes for example what they are going to be (e.g. educator, teacher, childcare worker etc.) and how they will be valued; terminology has relational/positional connotations
- In the training institutes the title of “educator” is used for EY students/graduates. The title of “childcare worker/ leader/ assistant/ manager/ supervisor /practitioner/ childhood professional” etc. is used on the ground in EY settings. In NZ the term teacher has been adopted by the early year’s sector to achieve the same status conferred to primary school teachers. There is need for alignment and agreement of titles.

- Are we afraid to use the term “care” and if so why? Traditionally care work is viewed as women’s work; care work is not viewed as having a professional status or an economic value despite the fact that society could not function without care work; care is intrinsic / implicit in educating therefore it goes without saying; the terminology used to describe the different levels of qualification e.g. FETAC Level 5 & 6 “Childcare” vs Levels 7 & 8 EY is Education/Education & Care confers status and differentiates between care & education. It was noted that an experienced practitioner with FL 5 or 6 qualifications may be equally competent and with a disposition suited to care/educate children. Empathy, compassion, kindness, respect, trust and wellbeing is encapsulate in care; the integral nature of care & education is envisioned, acknowledged and reflected in Síolta & Aistear – are we continuing to create an unnecessary false divide?
- How does our personal experience of being “taught” impact on our perception of the term “teacher”. Historically and culturally the term is an embedded concept.
- Parent & public perceptions and expectations hold sway in relation to status and value which may be implicit/explicit in language & terminology used and this has implications for the early years sector
- Language & terminology are value laden
- There is a need for a shift in our thinking toward the “continuum of care & education”. The quality and the early learning framework in particular provide a great opportunity to achieve a continuum from home through to EY & primary school setting
- With regard to impact, a review of the training institutes graduate surveys would give an indication of the progression/career paths/routes of early childhood education & care graduates
- To remove the divide there is a need to focus on what’s best for children – does terminology matter to children?

In summary

The group decided that the uses of terminology to describe, credentialise and to work within the sector was highly significant and value laden. They acknowledged the impact of historical experience, parent and public perceptions in terms of the usage and expectations of the sector, suggesting that this was exposed in sector terminology and thus in sector value. They highlighted the different uses of terminology within training institutions (educator) and on the ground, for example, “childcare worker”. They drew attention to a similar phenomena within the different levels of professional education (FETAC) with “childcare” used to describe levels 5 & 6, and “EY” in terms of levels 7 & 8. They also debated the

differential in value attached to the terms “care” and “education” and questioned why the former appears to be less valued than the latter and indeed why there is a need to have created a divide and to continue to uphold the divide between those two terms. Moving forward, they suggested (1) a review of training institutes graduate surveys as potentially useful in informing progression within the sector and (2) development of a question that examines the values that underpin the terminology/language used by all of the key stakeholders, and in particular the terminology used in the title of those working with children.

Learning environments that work: softening the boundaries Margaret Kernan

Q1. Expanding the research on learning environments in Ireland – what accounts for its neglect?

Q2. Adult: Child power dynamics & children’s agency – What contribution could further research on power dynamics make?

Q.3 How might we envision an expansive view of learning environments beyond the traditional home, ECEC and school setting?

Q.4 What contribution with an interdisciplinary approach make?

Points of discussion;

- Cessation of EOCP & NCIP capital grants – there is a lack of capital funding for innovative projects in the early years sector. During the EOCP/NCIP period of funding there was opportunities for some interdisciplinary engagement e.g. building/ design conference/seminars
- System weakness – the systems that exist do not support or encourage innovation and an interdisciplinary approach to the planning and construction of learning environments
- Recent ESRI studies provide examples of innovative approaches used in special classes e.g. the provision of sensory rooms, connectivity between indoor and outdoor and with the local community, demonstrating that innovative approaches are possible. A study of ICT rollout in schools shows the difficulties experienced due to the physical environment and layout of the traditional classroom.

- The public/parent perception and expectation of the default/traditional image of the “classroom” is a challenge.
- Implementation of Aistear within the existing space vs the “Aistear room” within the school setting is a challenge.
- Power dynamics – health & safety and regulations have an influence on the power dynamics as children are prevented/ discouraged from activities in the interest of H&S. There is a need to consult with children and to carry out risk assessment as exposure and appropriate opportunities for children to take risks in the environment is important for the child’s overall development and ability to assess risk themselves. The adults as “gate keepers” need to make space for children’s voices to be heard and to empower children by involving them in the design of their own space as competent contributors and users of the space.
- A correlation was made between the implementation of Aistear in the school setting and the Early Start Model.

In Summary

The group drew attention to lack of capital funding and support for innovative projects, in addition to the challenges presented by; traditional expectations of parents in terms of classroom spaces, lack of interdisciplinary involvement in spatial design, the influence of health and safety regulations in terms of discouraging risk taking which was considered essential to child development. The manner in which Aistear was implemented was also discussed in addition to the varied and multifaceted innovative practices exposed in ESRI studies regarding special classes. It was suggested that there is a need to consult with children and to empower children by involving them in the design of their own space as competent contributors to, and users of, the space.

Untangling the Knots... Mary Maloney

- Q1. Does a degree confer status?
- Q2. Is everyone worthy of professional status?
- Q3. What infrastructure needs to be in place for the professionalization of the sector?
- Q4. How have other groups gained professional status?

Points of discussion;

- There is need to develop a shared understanding between professionals of what actually happens in each of the various settings. This could lead to mutual understanding and shared values and a continuum of care and education between the settings.
- Shared Aistear CPD for teachers & EY professionals could help to develop mutual understanding and shared values leading to a continuum of care and education.
- The question is not so much “Is everyone worthy of professional status” but that every child deserves the best possible learning experience facilitated by a competent adult.
- The question as to why the government only become involved when the child reaches the age of 4 i.e. when eligible for enrolment in school and why provision for younger children is largely left to private provision? It was noted that EY sector is estimated to be 70% dependent on private provision and that in general private providers are largely concerned with the best interests of the children. It was also noted that private provision is also a feature in the area of education. A question as to whether this is the best model was posed.
- The question was asked as to whether greater integration is achieved in countries where the Departments of Education take a lead?
- An infrastructure / model which keeps the child at the centre and takes account of the CPD and training of the adults and resources needed is essential.
- Gender & Care – there is a need for deconstruction of our understanding of these terms and impact for the EY.

In summary

It was suggested by the group that the focus should be placed on providing the best learning experience for the child, facilitated by a competent adult, rather than dwelling on whether everyone is worthy of professional status. The group acknowledged the need for professionals to be aware of what actually happens in various educational settings and the need for a continuum of care and education. They highlighted the potential usefulness of a shared Aistear CPD between teachers and EY professionals in terms of accommodating this. They questioned the lack of government involvement in provision for children below the age of four and suggested that this might not be the best way to achieve greater sector integration. Ultimately they called for a model that keeps the child as a focal point in future research, and training programmes that provides combined CPD training, as essential. They also highlighted the need to be aware of and research the impact of the terms “gender and Care” on the EY sector.

Multiple Transitions in Early Childhood Education Mary O’Kane

Q1. How can we better shift our focus from ready children to ready children & ready education settings?

Q2. How can we develop stronger relationships between home, EY & school settings?

Q3. How can engagement with Aistear be better supported within pre & primary school settings?

Points of discussion;

- The teacher: child ratio is not conducive to creating a ready child & ready education setting. This is a major barrier.
- The primary setting is now beginning to recognise and acknowledge the value of the learning which takes place in the EY setting. This is to be welcomed.
- There is need for a “passport” for the child transitioning from the EY to the school setting.
- Shared spaces for teachers & EY professionals to meet to share good practice, gain mutual understanding and shared values and to jointly participate in Aistear CPD would be beneficial for all.
- Aistear has the potential to smooth transitions between home, EY & school settings

- “Losing the present to the future”, the aim should be preparation for now and celebration of the child and childhood in its own right
- The role of relationships between the key stakeholders i.e. child, parents, EY professional & teacher in smoothing transitions and building trust between the key stakeholders and the public is important. There is a need to challenge perceptions.

In summary

In this session the group highlighted the need to change perceptions between stakeholders and between the sector and the public. The growing realisation of the usefulness of the EY sector in terms of child development, education and preparation for the school setting, was welcomed. It was felt that Aistear would be particularly useful in terms of smoothing transitions between home, EY and school settings, and (in terms of sector dialogue and cooperation) providing shared sector CPD courses. Moving forward they suggested the use of a “passport” for the child transitioning between EY and the school setting, and the need to challenge taken for granted perceptions.

