

The Journey Towards Professionalism in Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland

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Overview

- A Question of Identity
- Influences
 - Past
 - Present
 - Future
- Decisions
- Actions



Who is the professional in early childhood care and education?

- Teacher
- Nurse
- Therapist
(speech and language etc.)
- Child Care Worker
(dependant on setting?)
- Childminder



Influences

Social Policy

Child rearing
practice

Identity

Funding of
Service provision

Personal

Funding for provision

- State provides e.g. England, France, Norway
 - Universal
 - Small private sector
 - Centrally controlled and monitored (federal or local)
 - Professional practice regulated
- State aided
 - Targeted
 - Large commercial/private provision
 - Limited oversight and monitoring
 - Unregulated practice

Child rearing practice

- Family based
- Private
- Female domain
- Childcare provision mirrors cultural beliefs regarding child rearing
- No need for 'expert' professional
- Women's issue



Personal

- Our personal identity
 - Values
 - Attitudes
 - Beliefs
 - Culture
 - Life experiences
- Our image of the child
 - Vulnerable, consumer,
 - competent, citizen with rights



Social Policy in Ireland

- Constitution published in 1937 – (pre WW2)
- Patriarchal, Catholic Church, Principle of Subsidiarity – (State - hands off the family!)
- Social services – state funded not provided
- Importance of education
 - Post colonial ambitions
 - E.g. infant education through Irish
- Role of philanthropy – provision of services
 - Religious, moralistic, middle class

Educational traditions

Introducing Froebel gifts
1892



School classroom
1902



The dominance of the church



Status of Women

THE COALITION DISCRIMINATES AGAINST WOMEN

In a variety of ways Irish women are being discriminated against. The current Coalition Government, in spite of its many promises, has not enacted a full programme of legislation which gives Irish women their complete and total rights.

This must stop. Your vote for Fianna Fáil will put it right.

In all the areas set out below the current legislation favours men to the disadvantage and often the hardship and deprivation of women.

- No Equal Job Opportunity
- No Equal Unemployment Benefits
- No Equal Pay for Equal Work
- Taxation
- Employment After Marriage
- Promotion Opportunities
- Broken Marriages
- Pension Schemes
- House Purchase and Loans

**FIANNA FÁIL
WILL PUT THAT
RIGHT**

Women's Affairs and Family Law Reform

The **Report of the Inter-departmental Working Party** on Women's Affairs and Family Law Reform was published on Thursday 16th May, 1985.

It identifies in a comprehensive way all the main issues affecting women's lives and will be a charter for progress in the years ahead.

- the 1985 Budget made provision for dental, optical and aural benefits to be available to all pregnant women whose husbands are fully insured. This is a first step in the extension of these benefits to all non-working wives of fully insured persons. It is worth noting that if a pregnant woman has not completed her dental treatment prior to confinement this can continue after confinement;
- a series of information leaflets have been published through the Minister of State for Women's Affairs Office covering a wide range of areas e.g. Pre-school facilities, Information for Widows;
- the holding of Seminars has been a special feature of the Minister's office in key areas of interest to women. Most recently a series of Seminars relating to Women in Business have been held. A further Seminar in this series is to be held in Cork on 30 May.
- the United Nations Decade for Women ends this year. It will be marked by an International Conference in Nairobi in July;

A number of functions have been held to mark the end of the decade including a North/South Seminar held in Dundalk in April. A national report to mark the end of the decade is being prepared and will be submitted to the World Conference at Nairobi in July;

In the **Law Reform** area a number of initiatives have taken place, or will be implemented in the course of 1985, for example:

- the passing of the Health (Family Planning) Amendment Bill, 1985;
- the setting up of a Pilot Scheme for conciliation in family law cases (March 1985);
- the publication of the draft Illegitimacy Bill, which will provide for the elimination of discrimination against children born outside marriage;
- the publication of the Children's (Care and Protection) Bill, 1985, which when effected, will implement many of the recommendations of the Task Force on Child Care services;
- the proposed introduction of legislation to remove the concept of the dependent domicile of women.

Implications for ECCE

- Low female participation rates in labour market (1973 marriage bar lifted only on entry to EU)
- Early entry to formal school
- Low usage of out of home ECCE (36% 2007)
- No state intervention until late 1990's
- Proliferation of stakeholders in provision of ECCE
- Each with unique history, culture and identity
- Female dominated, characterised as caring, extension of mothering

The 'ECCE sector' in 1997

- Diversity of provision, practice and philosophy
- Female dominated
- Under resourced and under valued
- Concerned with basics of survival
- Low levels of training
- No tradition of collaboration or dialogue
- No common language or title
- Lots of energy, passion and commitment!

1997 - 2010

- Growth in policy attention
- Lots of money!
- Accountability!
- Steady rise in qualification profile
- Opportunities to come together and discuss issues related to practice and professional identity
- Publication of a wide range of policy documents based on consultation on core values and principles

Legacy of investment in 2009

- Built up childcare places - emphasis on full day-care
- Developed administrative infrastructure at local, regional and national level
- Development of diverse employment opportunities for the ECCE workforce
- Funded research and development
 - Siolta, the national quality framework
 - Aistear, the Early Childhood Curricular Framework
 - Workforce Development Plan – Common Award Standards and Occupational profiles.

2010 - present

- Development of infrastructure – service provision and administration
- Recession
- Introduction of Free Preschool Year Scheme
- Move from focus on economic development to child development
- Rise of advocacy groups
- Growth of indigenous research – e.g Prevention and Early Intervention programmes
- European and international policy and research

Rising status of ECCE

- Attention of economists e.g. James Heckman (Boston Review Oct 2012)
- Neuroscience evidence – *Neurons to Neighbourhoods* (Shonkoff et al 2000)
- EU Communication, February 2011
- CoRe Report on competences in early childhood education and care (ECEC) December 2011
- OECD High Level Roundtable on the Economics of ECEC, Oslo, Norway February 2012.
- Early Childhood is a high priority

Changed perspectives

- Shift from impact on labour market to impact on children
- Creation of spaces – quality of experiences
- Disconnected policy – integrated policy
- Silos of practice – inter agency/inter-professional working

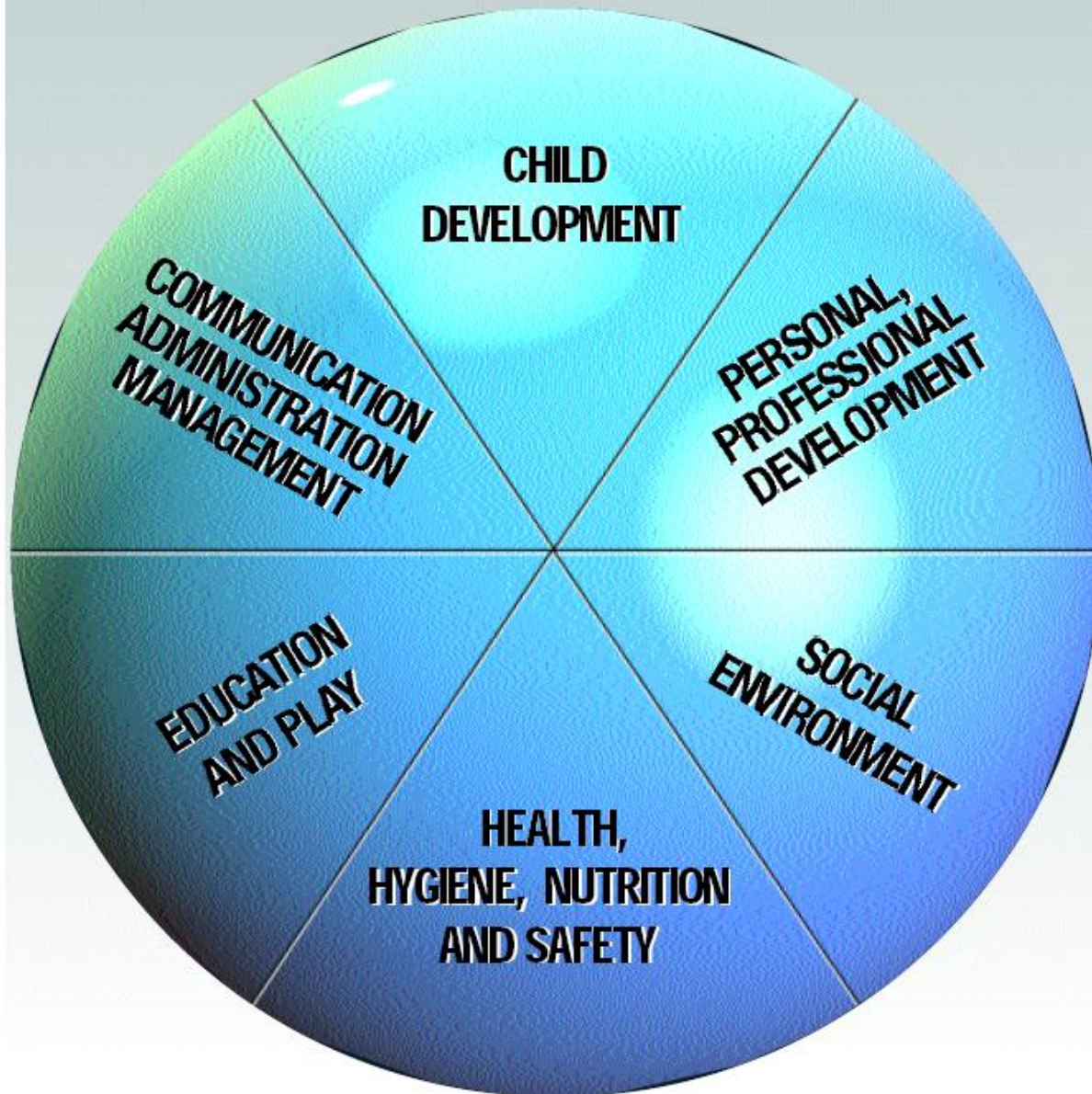
Workforce in ECCE in 2012

- 22,000+ employed in ECCE settings
- Predominantly female (98%)
- 80% have ECCE specific qualification at level 5 or higher
- Almost one third work 'part time' hours
- 10% are on Community Employment Schemes
- Majority (55%) in services with less than 3 staff
- Diverse membership support groups e.g. Playgroups
Full Day Care, Montessori, HighScope etc

Occupational Profiles

Basic Practitioner	Level 4	Student – may have achieved minor award
Intermediate Practitioner	Level 5	e.g. FETAC Major award in Childcare/ECCE
Experienced Practitioner	Level 6	e.g. FETAC Major Award
Advanced Practitioner	Level 7/8	Bachelors Ordinary level degree
Expert Practitioner	Level 8+	Bachelors Honours degree or above

Areas of core knowledge and skills



Naming and Framing?

2000 (n=180)

No consensus on identity

Discrete 'silos' of practice

Rejection of 'professional' status

2008/9 (n=330)

Greater consensus on core values, knowledge

Evolved understanding of concept of professionalism

Diversity within agreed parameters of practice

Still no firm sense of identity as a profession

2008 (n=1,780)

- What philosophy or curriculum informs the programme of activities that you offer in your setting?
 - Montessori
 - High/scope
 - Play based
 - Naionrai
 - Aistear
- Not sure – 42%

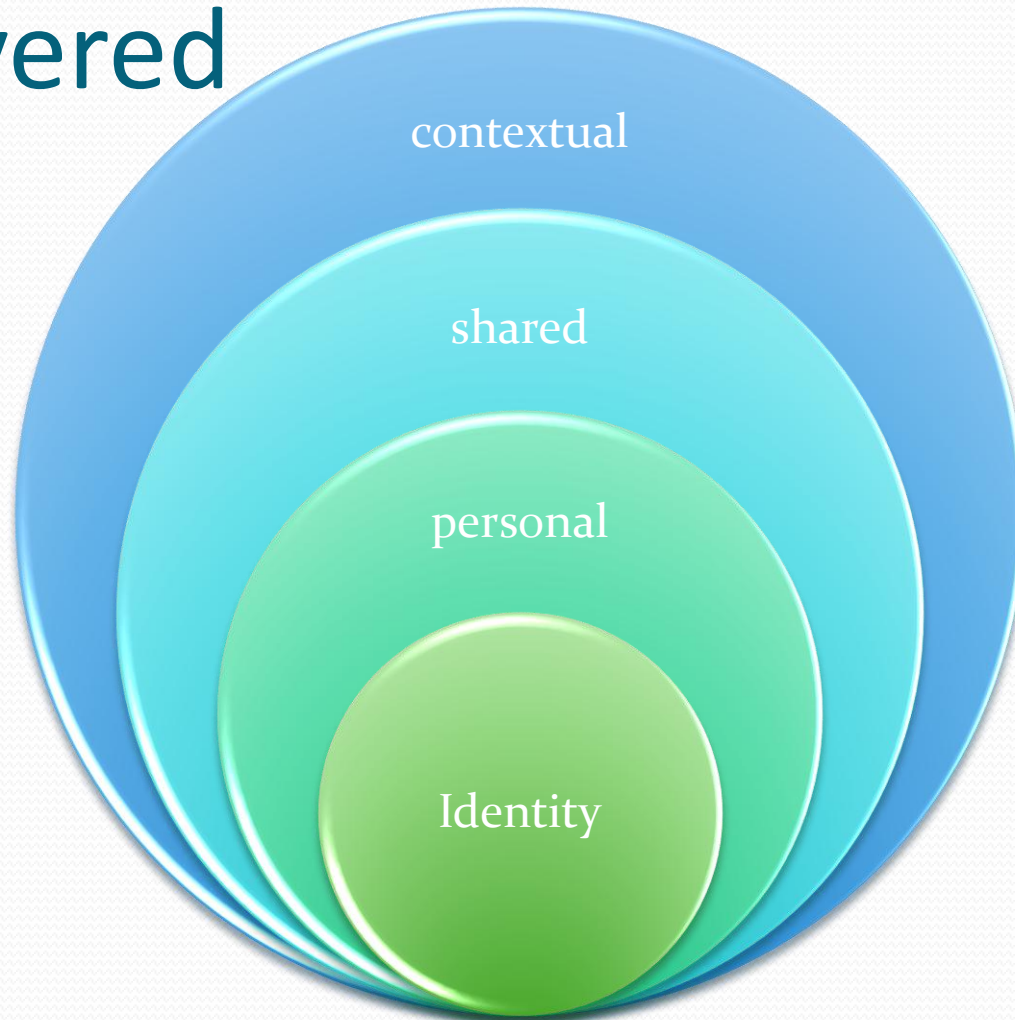
2012 (n= 4,200 approx)

- *“Which of the following best describes the programme of activities offered to children aged 3-5 years in your setting?”*



- The most popular responses were:
- Montessori 54%
- Playbased 14%
- High/Scope 13%
- Naoinra 6%
- “Pre-school” 3%
- “Siolta/Aistear” 3%
- Mixture of above 4%
- Steiner 1%
- Reggio Emilia 0.4%

Professional Identity multi-layered



**Structured on the
outside but still in
flux at the heart of
practice**



Where are we now?

- Direct funding for service provision
- Funding driving qualification profile
- Identifiable professional pathways into and through the profession
- Recognition of value of graduate role
- Universal participation of children in pre-school
- Increased status = increasing accountability

Profession = Professionalism?

- Are they the same?
- If some are professionals who are not?
- Who should decide?
- What are the boundaries?

Key concepts to think about...

1. Professionalism as an ecological concept that is globally referenced to 'quality provision' and locally defined and determined through specific socio-historical dynamics in which people are active participants (Dalli; Dayan; Kinos; Miller; Urban; Oberhuemer)
2. Professionalism as a marker of individual identity, a self-identification that enables individual practitioners to take on behaviour that they identify as high quality effective practice (Adams; Dalli; Peeters)
3. Professionalism as expertise that accretes from knowledge, dispositions, attitudes and experience on an ongoing basis (Karila; Kuisma & Sandberg; Oberhuemer; Peeters)

Key concepts continued

4. Professionalism as mandated by regulations and standards of practice that are externally monitored (Dalli; Miller);
5. Professionalism as openness to learning and to critique, and as an outgrowth of reflective practices (Peeters; Kuisma & Sandberg)
6. Professionalism as a quality embedded in practice and in relationships with children, colleagues, parents and management (Adams; Dalli; Dayan; Oberhuemer)
7. Professionalism as a marker of social status and as a distinguishing characteristic for an occupational group (Adams; Kinos)

Professionalism in ECCE

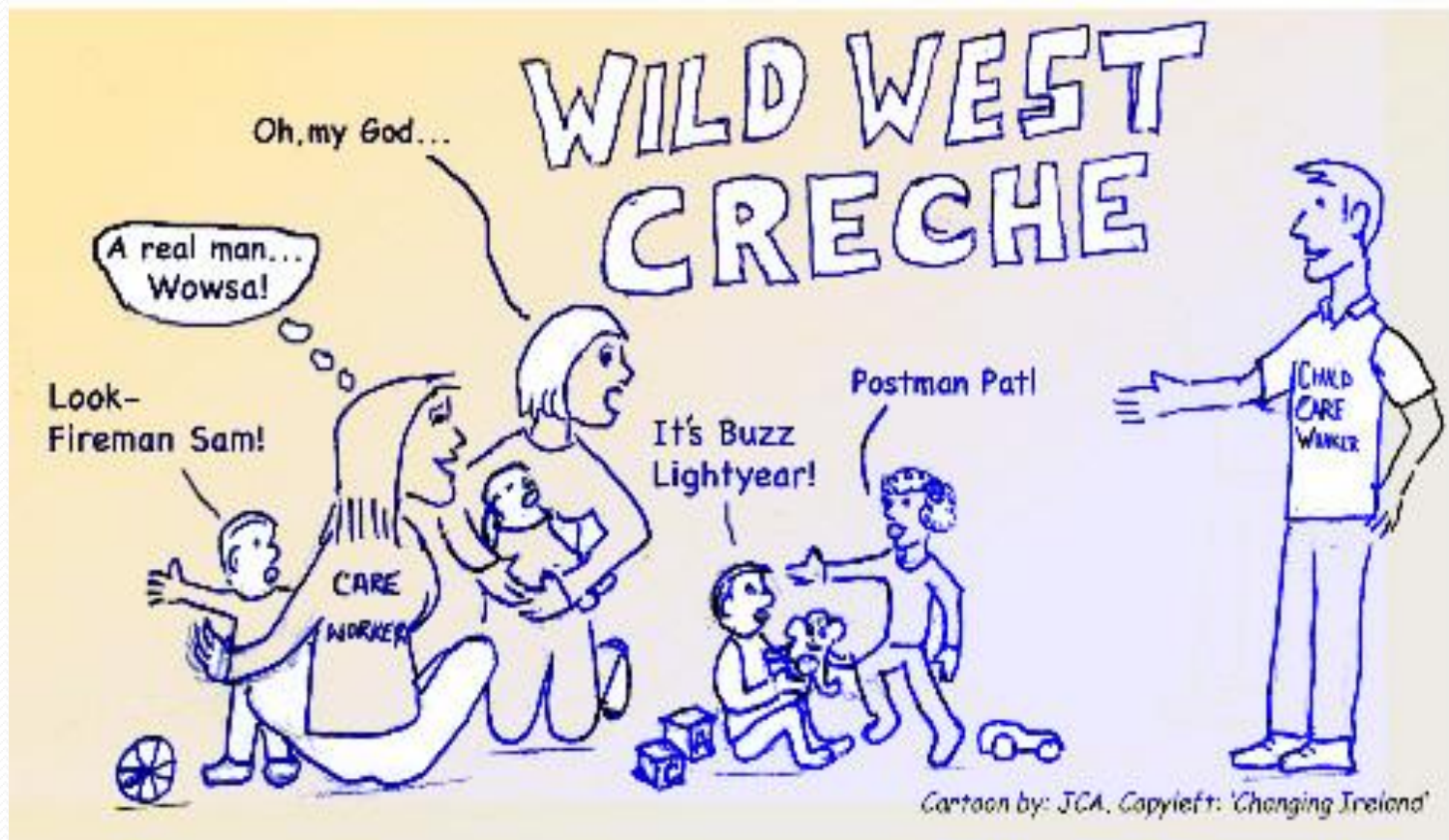
- Is centred on the well-being, learning and development of children from birth to six/eight years
 - Activating citizenship in the present and the future
- Requires specific knowledge and skills that are multi disciplinary
 - Learning theory, child development, sociology, philosophy, neuroscience
- Is a collaborative practice based on respectful relationships and partnership
 - Parents, Children, Colleagues, other professionals
- Is an on-going reflective dialogue that requires being fully present and self- aware
- Is evidence based, rigorous and open to change

Some challenges for the future..

- Answer the question – who are we?
- Resist the draw of more established professions e.g. primary teaching
- Address the gender balance (and wider diversity issues)
- Reject the division of care and education – 0-3 matters too!
- Build capacity to engage with core knowledge, skills and values – initial education and CPD
- Communicate the message to all – policy makers, professional colleagues, parents and families, employers etc
- Develop and nurture leadership

Gender balance

On Tom's first day in the creche, he struggled with his superhero status...



Supports

- Síolta and Aistear as the national practice frameworks
- Research in practice
- Continuing Professional Development
- Advocacy and lobbying
- Don't be too polite, girls!



New Zealand ECEC rallying cry!

Don't be too polite girls,

Don't be too polite.

Have a little fight girls,

Have a little fight.

Don't be fearful of offending in case you get the sack

Just remember what we're fighting for and don't look
back!

Thank You ...

