

Experiential Learning: The Realm of Learning and Connection through ECEC Field Visits

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Centre for Education
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Context for the Study

BA Honours Degree in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

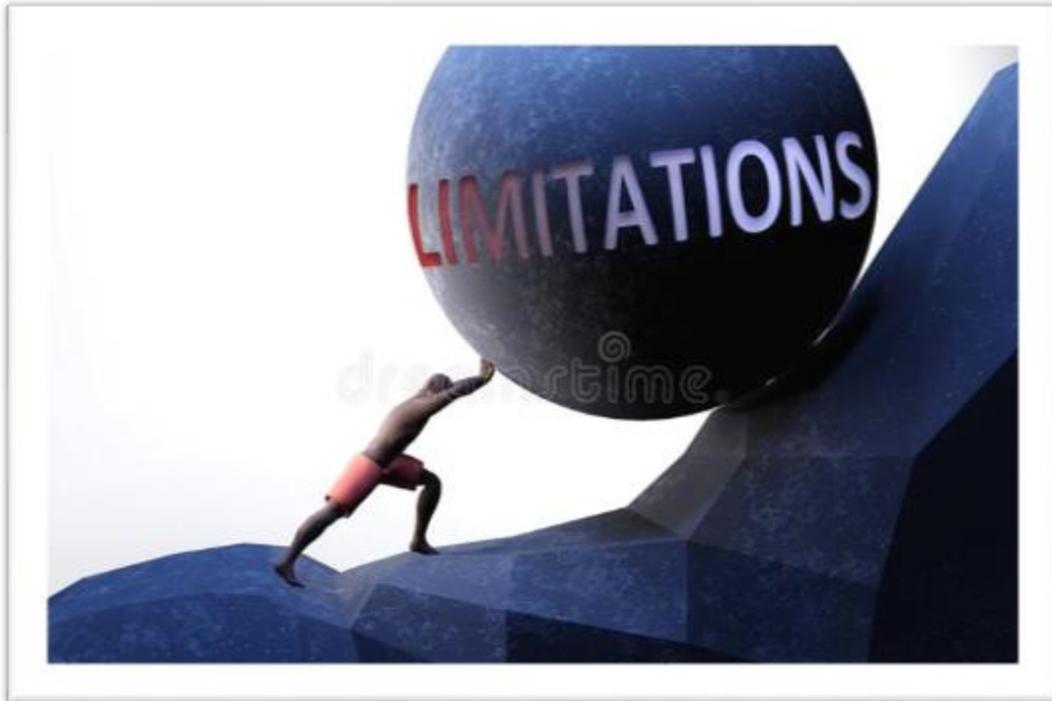
- ▶ Year 1 students
- ▶ 4 field visits to early childhood settings
- ▶ Experience a range of ECEC approaches- Montessori, Highscope, Play-based
- ▶ Assessment 50% - Reflective Field Visit Report



Research Design

- ▶ Exploring the experiences of students, ECEC Providers and Room Leaders during student field visits.
- ▶ NCI granted ethical approval for this study.
- ▶ **Online Survey:**
 - ▶ 31 students invited (n=25) 81%
 - ▶ 12 ECEC providers invited (n=8) 67%
- ▶ **Mixed-method** quantitative and qualitative research approach - constructivist/subjective perspective- pragmatic approach.

Limitations of this study



(Photo by: Suszycki, 2024)

- ▶ There were restraints on the **sample size**.
- ▶ There was **sample bias** due to generalizability as this research only involved the views and opinions of 1-year undergrad students and providers/educators
- ▶ The **timing** of the study

Aims of this research

- ▶ To capture and record **students' and educators'/providers lived experiences** of student field visits.
- ▶ To understand the **impact** of field visits **on student learning outcomes**.
- ▶ To identify the **factors that contribute to the success** of field visits.
- ▶ To provide **insights** into **how ECEC field visits can be enhanced** for future ECEC 1st-year undergraduate students.

Literature Review

- ▶ Experiential learning is **knowledge** created through **transforming experience**. (Kolb, 1984).
- ▶ **Goal-oriented** field visits are **essential** to experiential learning (Foo and Foo, 2022).
- ▶ Enables **active experiential learning** for students. (Malbrecht *et al.*, 2016; Malone, 1999).
- ▶ Allow students to **apply classroom learning** in real-life contexts. (Campbell *et al.*, 2021).
- ▶ Students' classroom-based **knowledge retention increases**
- ▶ Students engage at a **deeper level of learning**, which supports responsible attitudes and positive behaviours as students

Lit cont.

- ▶ **Captivating** curiosity and inquiry
- ▶ **Increasing** motivation to learn
- ▶ **Connects** theoretical concepts to professional practice
- ▶ **Strengthens** observation and perception skills
- ▶ **Gain positive attitudes** towards their subject
- ▶ Successful field trips may **not be guaranteed**, and learning may **not last** without **reflection or debriefing** (Behrendt & Franklin, 2014).

Key Findings



Interactions with children and educators

Student Experience

- **'Interacting** with the children during playtime' (singing, dancing, pretend play) (P19)
- **'Seeing** how the children play and Interact '(P23).
- **'Speaking** with and **learning from** the educators' (P20).

Educator Experience

- **'The students interacted appropriately.** One student read books with the children and then came down to their level and asked them multiple open-ended questions, which was great to see. **Some students were a little reserved** just because they weren't familiar with the children, as expected' (P7).
- **Some were confident** and asked lots of questions, and others didn't (P8).

Motivation to Learn

Desire To Learn

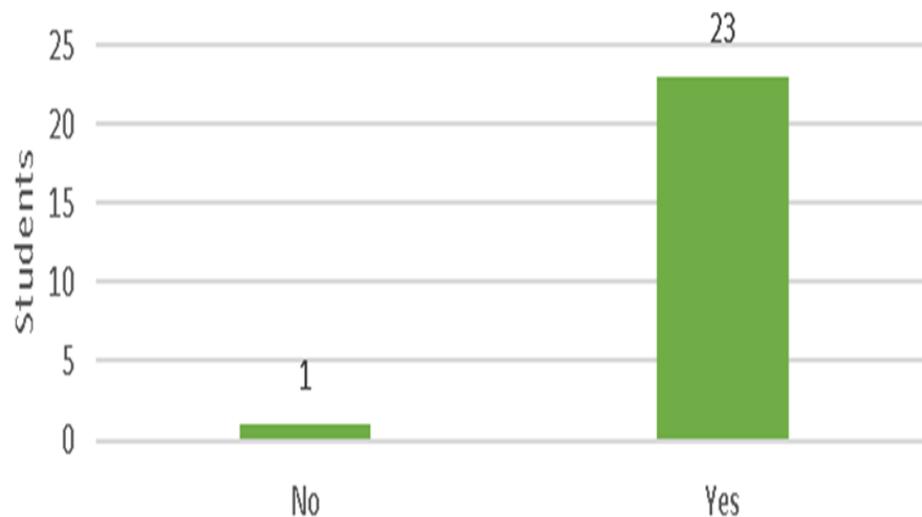
- **It motivated me to learn** more about children & their overall development (P7).
- **It increased my interest** in why I want to work with children & why I want to continue with my degree (P3)

Confirms Career Direction and Field of Study.

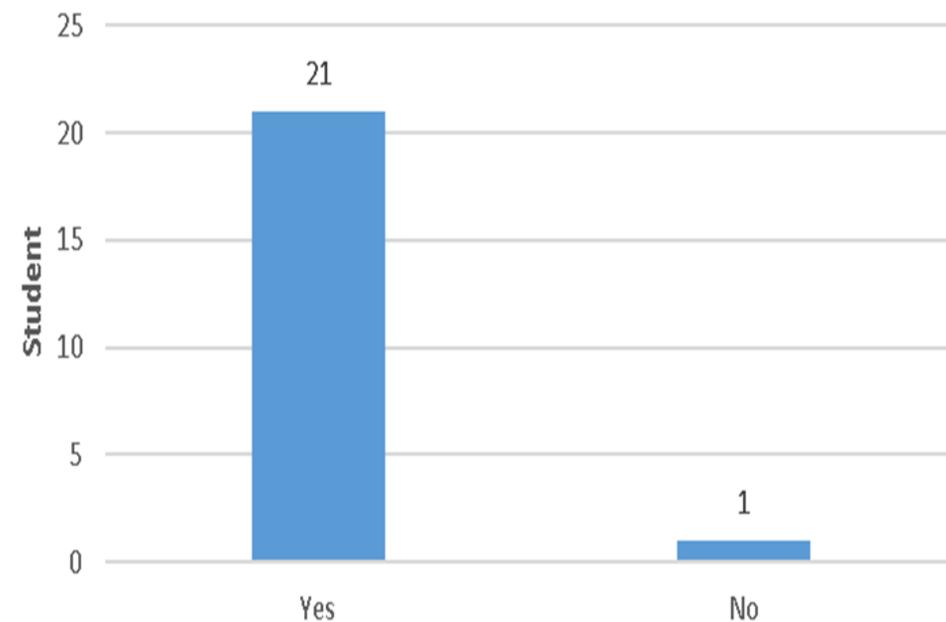
- **It made me want to work in this area** for definite . . .So, it makes me **more motivated to keep learning** and to one day work in an ECEC environment (P11).
- Now that I've experienced it, **I'm 100% sure** this is the road I want to go down, so now I have to put in **100% effort to make sure I achieve this goal** (P16).

Enhanced Understanding

Enhanced Understanding of the Concepts
& Theories being studied in class?



Lasting Impact on Your Understanding of
ECEC



How did the field visit enhance your understanding of the concepts and theories?

- ▶ **Seeing Aistear framework** hung on the wall. Identity and belonging are achieved by having a child's picture and birthdays underneath (P2).
- ▶ It's hard to understand when you're reading off slides but **seeing it in action makes it easier to understand** (P5).
- ▶ It **put the theories into perspective** and helped me understand what my lectures were speaking about in the lecture (P9).
- ▶ Being an International student, it helped me to have a **broad understanding of the curricula and policies** held in Ireland for ECEC (P13).
- ▶ I was able to **see Montessori and High-scope techniques are being applied** to an early years setting (materials, equipment, rooms) (P18).

Contribution to Professional and Personal Learning

Personal learning:

- Developing independence, confidence.

Professional learning:

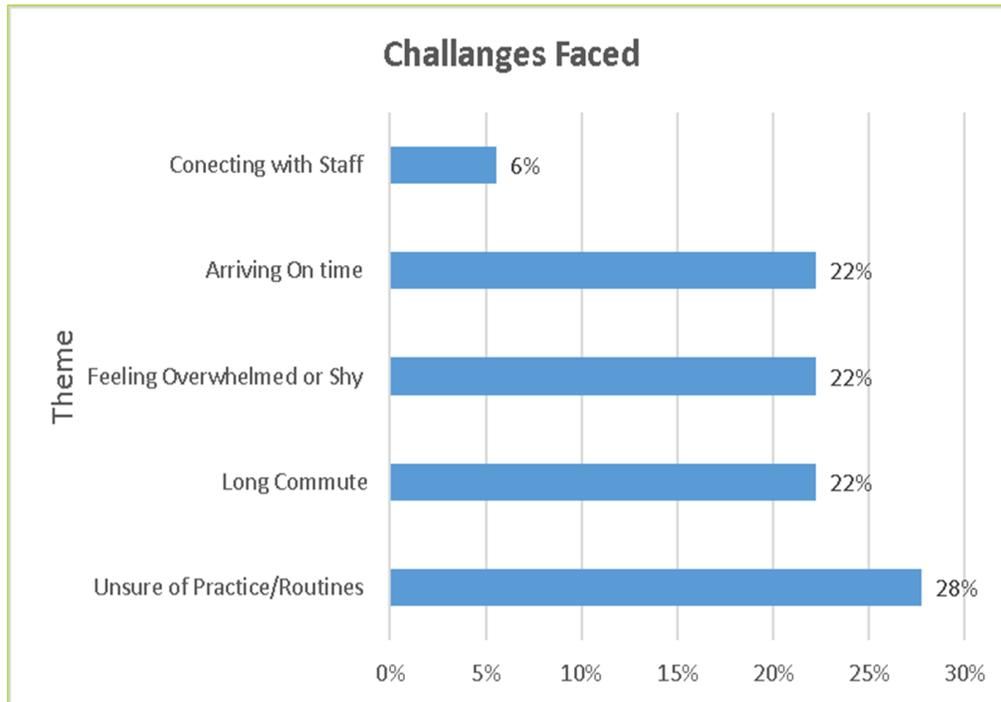
- Understanding ECEC professional values; developing ECEC values, attitudes and beliefs.
- Use of vocational and professional ECEC language.

‘I learned a lot from the field visits; they allowed me to see the ECEC settings from a different perspective and changed my perception of it.

Beforehand, I didn’t really know what to expect, but it gave me insight into the responsibilities of an Early Year’s Educator.

I felt this provided me a strong foundation for my personal beliefs, morals and how I would like to conduct myself in practice’ (P6).

Challenges



- ▶ Practical challenges
- ▶ Interpersonal challenges

Conclusion - A Way Forward

Opportunities for experiential learning and connecting with young children and educators in EC settings supports:

- ▶ Making the theory and concepts real
- ▶ Positive changes in interest, motivation, values about working with young children and ECEC

Way forward- practical changes

- ▶ In class scenarios and activities to support:
 - ▶ Practice and application to practice
 - ▶ Students' confidence and interpersonal skills with children and educators
- ▶ Encourage students to meet each other before visits
- ▶ Arrange field visits with less travel



Thank You

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