



Conference Report

13th June 2018

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Acknowledgements:

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) would like to thank all the contributors to the conference; Keynote Speakers, Irish Policy Responders, Parallel Session Rapporteurs, Parallel Session Presenters, Conference Exhibitors and all those who attended and participated on the day. We are also very grateful to those who contributed to the conference planning including the Conference Abstract Review Committee and the ELI Advisory Board. Finally, we would like to thank all of our partners in Dublin's Inner City, as well as partner sites across Ireland, for their continued collaboration and commitment to supporting children and families to reach their full potential.

Summary:

As part of the National College of Ireland (NCI), the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) is a community-based educational initiative, which provides 'world-class' educational support programmes at each stage of a child's/young person's educational journey. This is in line with NCI's mission to change lives through education.

On the 13th June 2018, ELI hosted an early-years conference titled '*The Constitutional Role of Parents as the Primary Educators of their Children*'. Children's rights are enshrined in the Irish constitution, law and policy but for young children, the main way they can realise those rights are through their parents. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child places a duty on the State to respect the rights and responsibilities of parents [Article 5] and to support them with their child-rearing responsibilities [Article 18]. As a nation, we need to empower parents as the primary educators of their children to realise their children's right to be respected, protected and fulfilled; and ensure that parents have the support and resources to help their children realise their maximum potential now and in the future.

The conference aimed to:

- Raise awareness of the vital role that parents have as primary educators of their children and how this contributes to children's development and learning
- Highlight how early years and family support services can support parents in their role as primary educators of their children
- Showcase quality practice-based research projects from across Ireland.

There were approximately 100 attendees, comprised of early-years practitioners, educators, Home Visitors, family support services, community and statutory organisations, students and prospective students, parents and researchers, policy makers and interested parties. The format included two keynote speakers (one morning and one afternoon), two sets of parallel interactive workshops (one morning and one afternoon), and a plenary session at the end of the day based on the feedback from workshop participants. The full conference programme can be seen in Appendix 1.

Key policy recommendations from the conference included:

- Long term Government plans for early interventions for children and families. Name, capture, and improve upon what is working well
- Promote the value of play to parents and early years professionals
- Build awareness with practitioners and parents on:
 - What is important for school readiness
 - Resilience in children. Upskill early years professionals on how they can support parents to promote resilience in their children.
- Suitable housing for families to support children/families. Government and services to treat people as individuals using respectful language, not 'homeless', 'addicted' etc. The situation is the problem and not the individual
- Community response to social isolation

This Report is a summary of the conference proceedings, outlining details of the contributors, key policy recommendations and feedback from delegates.

The complete Book of Abstracts and slides from the keynotes and the parallel sessions are available by request from Rhonda Hill at Rhonda.Hill@ncirl.ie or 01 4498717.

Conference Programme:

Welcome and Introduction:

Gina Quin, President of National College of Ireland (NCI) formally welcomed delegates to the conference on behalf of NCI and ELI. Gina discussed children's and parents' rights and outlined NCI's commitment to supporting both through education. She also touched on the need to rethink gender stereotypes in parenting in order to benefit children, parents and society.

Keynote Speakers:

Minister Paschal Donohoe TD- The Role of Fathers as Primary Educators of Their Children

Paschal Donohoe, TD and Minister for Finance & Public Expenditure and Reform spoke about the role of fathers as primary educators of their children; the importance of this role and what support fathers need to help them play an active role in their children's education and lives.

As part of his speech, he outlined his thoughts on how parents, of all genders and from all communities, can be empowered to fully realise their constitutional role as the primary educators of their children. He outlined the need for parents and society in general to move from the traditional roles of father as financial provider and mother as carer and home maker to the modern egalitarian parenting model, where both parents are active equal partners in their children education and lives. The challenges parents face when trying to achieve a parenting-work-life balance were outlined with Paschal calling on employers to value employees' parenting role.



Minister Paschal Donohoe TD and children from Little Treasures Crèche and St Laurence O'Toole's JBNS, Sherriff Street

Francis Chance, Katharine Howard Foundation- Giving our Children the Best Start in Life the Voices of Parents.

Francis is the Programme Manager of The Nurture Programme – Infant Health and Wellbeing with the Katharine Howard Foundation (KHF). Pregnancy and the early years of childhood are the most crucial times to ensure that children grow up healthy and happy and have the best possible chance of achieving their full potential. For many years, the Katharine Howard Foundation has been engaged in supporting initiatives that provide early interventions to children and families. Crucial to this work is empowering parents and ensuring their perspectives inform family-focused services and support. Francis summarised the key messages from a Katharine Howard Foundation Report outlining the feedback from almost 500 parents. In the report, parents identified how Irish services can be more closely attuned to the supports that they tell us they need and find most helpful. Both reports are available on the Katharine Howard website: <http://khf.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Parents-Speak-Web-FINAL-Summary-Report.pdf>

Conclusions

- Important to build the voices of parents into the culture of our work
- Many parents are doing well and appreciate the services and supports available to them
- Significant numbers of parents are struggling – isolation from family and friends, juggling time, financial stresses, difficulties in accessing services and supports
- Parenting matters – invest in it: childcare supports, family services and supports, supportive communities and employments.....



Morning Parallel Sessions

The first set of parallel sessions were held in the morning and focused on topics such as supporting parents in challenging circumstances and policymaking in relation to parents. The presentations are listed below:

Family Learning: Valuing Parents	Mary Flanagan, Clare Family Learning part of Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board LCETB
Family Literacy: A framework for practice	Lana McCarthy, Youngballymun
Supporting migrant families in our community	Maja Krpeta, Irina Ivanova & Lisa Jing Xia Miao, Early Learning Initiative (ELI)
A national Code of Ethics for Early Years Teachers	Heino Schonfeld, Barnardos Ireland
Parents Role and Educators Responsibility in Realising Children's Right to Play	Dr Emer Ring & Dr Lisha O'Sullivan, Mary Immaculate College
An analysis of preschool reading abilities and the contribution of the home literacy environment	Amy Martin, Applied Behaviour Research Group, National University of Ireland, Galway
Building the foundations of good relations in home and family life	Pauline McClenaghan, Lifestart Foundation & Mary Holmes, Shaping Ourselves and Our Children (SOOC)
An examination of parents' decision-making when choosing preschool for their child	Niamh Brophy, NUI Galway
Lost childhood - how the government can support parents and families to give every child a chance to reach their full potential	June Tinsley, Barnardos
Asymptomatic cCMV children diagnosed with delayed-onset hearing loss: Parental perspectives	Dr. Siobhán Laoide-Kemp, University College Cork, Wendy Mc Cracken, University of Manchester, Amr El Refaie, & Kai Uus
Evaluating a Parent-Led Application of the Preschool Life Skills Program	Ciara Gunning & Dr Jennifer Holloway, National University of Ireland Galway
The Changing Lives Initiative: An Early Intervention, Supporting Families with children at risk of ADHD	Eileen Costello Rawat, The Changing Lives Initiative, part of The Genesis Programme
Symposium 1: Findings from an exploration of the Preparing For Life data as part of a research study funded under the Children's Research Network Prevention and Early Intervention Research Initiative	Dr Gráinne Kent, Vasiliki Pitsia and Gary Colton, Early Learning Initiative.

The morning parallel sessions were chaired by:

- Dr Meera Oke, Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, National College of Ireland
- *Lesley Strahan*, Creche Manager, Lourdes Youth and Community Services Crèche
- Lana Cummins, Assistant Director, Early Learning Initiative
- *Dr Conor Nolan*, Associate Faculty Lecturer in Psychology, National College of Ireland
- *Emma Reilly*, Senior Childcare Services Manager, Cooperative Housing Ireland



Afternoon Parallel Sessions

The second set of parallel sessions in the afternoon were focused on a range of themes, including the importance of play and the evaluation of parenting support programmes. The presentations are listed below:

Creating an infant play space	Marion Byrne, Early Learning Initiative (ELI)
Outdoor Play – A Partnership Approach	Carol Duffy, Early Childhood Ireland
Understanding changes for parents and children – experience of evaluation of the ABC Programme	Claire Hickey & Anne-Marie O’Riordan, Centre for Effective Services
Including the voice of parents and children in parenting research: How parents' and children's experiences of family life and parenting programmes in diverse communities may inform formal educational welfare policy and practice	Anne-Marie McGovern, Maynooth University
Exploring preschool language exposure in Irish homes	Tess O’Leary, Early Learning Initiative (ELI) & Oisín Hurley, Talk 2 Me More
Growing Child: An integrated evidence-based Model of Parenting Support	Tricia McLaughlin, Lifestart
The Childminding in Ireland Project (CMIP)	Miriam O’Regan, Dublin Institute of Technology
Symposium 2: Learning together: the Baby & Wobbler Room project	Helen Ryan, Aileen Kelleher & Suzanne Reilly, ABC Start Right Limerick

The afternoon parallel sessions were chaired by:

- Dr Meera Oke, Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, National College of Ireland
- *Lesley Strahan*, Crèche Manager, Lourdes Youth and Community Services Crèche
- *Dr Conor Nolan*, Associate Faculty Lecturer in Psychology, National College of Ireland
- *Emma Reilly*, Senior Childcare Services Manager, Cooperative Housing Ireland

Afternoon Plenary Session:

The afternoon plenary session was chaired by Dr Josephine Bleach, Director- Early Learning Initiative. The panel which included the afternoon keynote speaker Francis Chance together with Liz Kerrins, Children's Rights Alliance and Áine Lynch, National Parents Council discussed future parent-focused policy recommendations. A rapporteur from each parallel session brought back key policy recommendations from the group, as well as questions for the panel, including: How do we effectively blend key parenting messages with the practical support parents with children in early years to post-primary education need to implement those messages? How do we ensure a whole of Government approach to parenting and education that everyone can feed into and support?

Policy Recommendations' from the Plenary Session

- ✓ Long term plans from government for early interventions for child and families. Name, capture, and improve upon what is working well
- ✓ Promote the value of play to parents and professionals
- ✓ Build awareness with professionals and parents on:
 - a) What is important for school readiness
 - b) Resilience in children. Upskill professionals on how they can support parents to promote resilience in their children
- ✓ Suitable housing for families to support children/families. Government and services to treat people as individuals using respectful language, not 'homeless', 'addicted' etc. The situation is the problem and not the individual
- ✓ Community response to social isolation



Poster Presentations:

One poster presentation was showcased in the main Atrium area of the conference and was available during registration, break time and lunchtime. The poster presentation was:

The home literacy environment: a comparison of graduates of the Parent child Home Programme to national norms

Tess O’Leary and
Dr Gráinne Kent, Early Learning Initiative (ELI)

Exhibitors

A number of organisations, commercial and educational, availed of the opportunity to take a stand at the conference. The exhibitors engaged with conference attendees during registration, coffee break and lunch break, and it really added to the atmosphere of the event.

Blythe Spirit Ltd. – Educational Toy Suppliers

Barnardos Learning and Development Service

NCI Early Childhood Education Degree Programme

Zoom Ahead with Books and ABC Early Numeracy Programme- Early Learning Initiative

Parent Child Home Programme and ABC 0-2 Programme- Early Learning Initiative

National Parents Council

Asylum Migration and Integration Fund

Help My Child Learn – National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)



Conference Feedback

Feedback from conference attendees was very positive, with 100% of those who completed the evaluation (n=32) saying that they enjoyed the conference and would attend another conference hosted by ELI again and 100% saying they found it useful to them (n=31).

Highlights mentioned included:

- + Empowerment of parents - now delivering lectures on best practice e.g. NCI/migrant families, under 2yrs*
 - + Mixing with others and getting their views and feedback*
 - + Hearing about the research supporting why we are bringing reading/play into families (NUIG)*
 - + Wide variety of speakers but it was interesting to see that a common theme of the importance of the "home learning environment" was central to most of the talks*
 - + Listening to the Early Years practitioners experiences. Projects that are supporting parents*
 - + Variety of speakers 3 in 1 room very good. 20 minutes time keeping excellent. Kept to time. Good space time to get to next slot. Networking*
 - + The discussion about a national code of ethics*
 - + I really enjoyed listening about all the other organisations - what they do - what research they have completed and the outcomes of that research*
 - + Fantastically organised, the presentation sessions were very coherent, fit together well inspiring really useful and inspired discussions*
-

Suggested improvements included:

- + Having parents more involved in the workshops and learning about services/supports that have worked for them... Using the model of interview/relaxed discussion with parents can be very effective*
 - + Scope to move between parallel sessions*
 - + I think it would be useful to have more time for discussion at the end of each parallel session*
 - + Panel session was a bit unfocused... too many questions tied together and three separate answers made it hard to follow*
 - + Promote more political interaction on panel*
 - + The panel discussion needed more interaction from the floor*
 - + N/A - very impressed with the organisation and running of this conference. Maybe have a conference hashtag for us to tweet!*
 - + No. Very good. Possibly email list of those attending (data protection approved first!) Would like to email some of the relevant presenters to my own work*
 - + It might be beneficial to choose the parallel sessions beforehand. If multiple people are attending from a service, this would give them the opportunity to coordinate better*
-

What was the best thing about this conference?

- ✓ Breakout sessions. Good mix of attendees, good choice of sessions.*
- ✓ Mixing with others and getting their views and feedback.*
- ✓ Meeting people from other services. It broadened my horizon.*
- ✓ Fantastically organised, the presentation sessions were very coherent, fit together well. Inspiring, really useful and inspired discussions.*
- ✓ Congratulations to all involved in organising the conference. It was very professional and ran smoothly*
- ✓ Looking forward to the next one*

Key messages attendees were taking away from the conference:

There is some fantastic research going on in this area! Continuous need for support for development and dissemination and awareness of evidence based practices/supports

Importance of the home learning environment. Parent-child interactions in the home. Code of Ethics for Early Years Teachers - requirement for all.

Valuing parents' role means listening to them and consulting. Long term and multiparty policy and investment essential. Who are the

Don't assume - ask, consult,

I was bowled over by the sheer number of agencies. The diversity of supports that are available. The importance of connecting parents and joined up thinking from professionals. Homelessness is a key issue for many parents.



Appendix 1: Conference Programme

Page 1

8.30	Registration (Tea/Coffee)				
9.15	Welcome and Introduction – Gina Quin, President, National College of Ireland				
9.30	<p>Keynote 1 – Minister Paschal Donohoe TD- The Role of Fathers as Primary Educators of Their Children</p> <p>Minister Paschal Donohoe TD is the Fine Gael TD for Dublin Central and the Minister for Finance & Public Expenditure and Reform. Pascal is the proud father of two children and is actively involved in their education. As part of his speech, Pascal will outline his thoughts on how parents, of all genders and from all communities, can be empowered to fully realise their constitutional role as the primary educators of their children.</p>				
10.15	Move to Parallel Sessions				
10.30-12	<p><i>Parallel Session 1 (Room 2.02)</i> Chair- Dr. Meera Oke</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Family Learning: Valuing Parents (Mary Flanagan)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Family Literacy: A framework for practice (Lana McCarthy)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>Supporting migrant families in our community (Maja Krpeta & Irina Ivanova)</i></p> </div>	<p><i>Parallel Session 2 (Room 2.03)</i> Chair- Lesley Strahan</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>A national Code of Ethics for Early Years Teachers (Heino Schonfeld)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Parents Role and Educators Responsibility in Realising Children's Right to Play (Dr Emer Ring & Dr Lisha O'Sullivan)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>An analysis of preschool reading abilities and the contribution of the home literacy environment (Amy Martin)</i></p> </div>	<p><i>Parallel Session 3 (Room 2.04)</i> Chair- Lana Cummins</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Building the foundations of good relations in home and family life (Pauline McClenaghan & Mary Holmes)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>An examination of parents' decision-making when choosing preschool for their child (Niamh Brophy)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>Lost Childhood - how we can support parents and families to give every child a chance to reach their full potential (June Tinsley)</i></p> </div>	<p><i>Parallel Session 4 (Room 2.05)</i> Chair- Dr Conor Nolan</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Asymptomatic cCMV children diagnosed with delayed-onset hearing loss: Parental perspectives (Siobhan Laoide-Kemp, Wendy McCracken, Amr El Refaie & Kai Uus)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Evaluating a Parent-Led Application of the Preschool Life Skills Program (Ciara Gunning & Dr Jennifer Holloway)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>The Changing Lives Initiative: An Early Intervention, Supporting Families with children at risk of ADHD (Eileen Costello Rawat)</i></p> </div>	<p>SYMPOSIUM 1 (Room 2.08) Chair- Emma Reilly</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>Findings from an exploration of the Preparing For Life data as part of a research study funded under the Children's Research Network Prevention and Early Intervention Research Initiative (Dr Gráinne Kent, Vasiliki Pitsia and Gary Colton)</i></p> </div>
12-12.45	Hot Lunch				

<p>12.45-14.15</p>	<p><i>Parallel Session 1 (Room 2.02)</i> <i>Chair-Dr. Meera Oke</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Creating an infant play space (Marion Byrne)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Parents and Practitioners Perceptions of Play in Preschool (PPPPP) (Rita Melia)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>Outdoor Play – A Partnership Approach (Carol Duffy)</i></p> </div>	<p><i>Parallel Session 2 (Room 2.03)</i> <i>Chair- Lesley Strahan</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>Understanding changes for parents and children – experience of evaluation of the ABC Programme (Claire Hickey & Anne-Marie O’Riordan)</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Including the voice of parents and children in parenting research: How parents' and children's experiences of family life and parenting programmes in diverse communities may inform formal educational welfare policy and practice (Anne-Marie McGovern)</p> </div>	<p><i>Parallel Session 3 (Room 2.04)</i> <i>Chair- Dr Conor Nolan</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Exploring preschool language exposure in Irish homes (Tess O’Leary & Oisín Hurley)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p><i>Growing Child: An integrated evidence-based Model of Parenting Support (Tricia McLaughlin)</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>The Childminding in Ireland Project (CMIP) (Miriam O’Regan)</i></p> </div>	<p>SYMPOSIUM 2 (Room 2.08) Chair- Emma Reilly</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>Learning together: the Baby & Wobbler Room project (Helen Ryan, Aileen Kelleher & Suzanne Reilly)</i></p> </div>
<p>2.15-2.30</p>	<p>Move to keynote 2 (Tea and Coffee in Atrium)</p>			
<p>14.30</p>	<p>Keynote 2 – Francis Chance, Katharine Howard Foundation- Giving our Children the Best Start in Life the Voices of Parents Francis is the Programme Manager of The Nurture Programme-Infant Health and Wellbeing at the Katharine Howard Foundation. Francis is a Professionally Qualified Social Worker with almost 40 years experience of working with children in Ireland in both statutory and voluntary sectors. In his keynote address, Chance will discuss how Irish services can be more closely attuned to the supports parents need as identified by almost 500 parents.</p>			
<p>15.00</p>	<p>Plenary discussion with feedback from parallel sessions and questions for keynote speakers:</p> <p>Panel: Liz Kerrins, Early Years Manager, the Children’s Rights Alliance; Francis Chance, Programme Manager, the Nurture Programme, Katharine Howard Foundation; Aine Lynch, CEO, National Parents Council (Primary)</p> <p>Chairperson: Dr. Josephine Bleach, Director, Early Learning Initiative</p>			
<p>16.00</p>	<p>Conference Ends</p>			