



*Innovation, Resilience
and Continuity – The Impact of
the Covid-19 Pandemic on Early
Childhood Education and Care
Practice in Ireland*

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NCI Research Day June 25th 2021

Background

This research is a part of a larger project undertaken with partners in the Children's Research Network (CRNI) Special Interest Group (SIG) on Early Childhood Education Research.

Partner institutions include Marino Institute of Education, and Hibernia College.

A longitudinal study spread over 12 months.

Initial findings from the first wave of data generated in Feb/March 2021

The context of ECEC in Ireland



Largely private (74%) (Pobal, 2021)

ECEC services includes education and care for **children from birth to six**)

Diversity in settings and services:

Creches, Primary schools, independent sessional service. Services include Early childhood Education and Care and some after school care

Sector Undergoing Transformative changes

With the publication of curriculum ('Aistear' in 2009) and quality frameworks ('Siolta' in 2006) for ECEC as well as the recent publication of 'First Five' in Nov 2018.

Highly regulated and inspected

ECEC is one of the most regulated and inspected sectors in Ireland.

Working Conditions

The workforce is experiencing burnout with poor working conditions and low levels of reward and recognition predicting burnout.

Objectives

To explore ECEC *educator views on changes in ECEC practice* due to COVID19.

To explore *how ECEC practice is shaped* by the changes due to COVID19.

To explore the potential impact of changes due to COVID 19 on *children's well being through SDQs.*

To explore *perspectives on service users (parents) on changes to ECEC practice* due to COVID19

Theoretical Underpinnings

Bio-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

The ecological theory helps understand the impact of the distal macro system (COVID19 pandemic) as it influences children's proximal lives in their learning and development in ECEC micro settings. (Harkness and Super, 2009)

Methodology

- Approach - Phenomenological inquiry, participant-centered /multi-centered

Approval of ethics application

Sample: 10 ECEC settings identified through researcher networks

Semi structured interviews

SDQ for Parents and Educators

Analysis of data, MaxQDA 2020, preliminary codes identified

Preliminary Findings



Curriculum and Pedagogy

Innovation

- Creating learning resource packs to deliver to children and families
- Online engagement

Resilience

- Limited experience with technology/online engagement/delivery
- Determination to create/provide spaces to provide learning opportunities/peer engagement (physical and remote)



Relationships with parents



Innovation

- Regular review/update of procedures to meet parental needs within guidelines
- Remote and outdoor engagement using technology and creative spaces
- Supporting parental transitions (online and drop-off)

Resilience

- Ability to maintain relationships remotely (technology and outdoors)
- Ability to build relationships remotely (technology and outdoors)

Impact on children's participation learning and development



Innovation

- Adaptation of curriculum and pedagogy to ensure ongoing engagement/Creating a space for children to learn (guided by children's needs)
- Remaining mindful of school-readiness and using breakout rooms to meet the needs of all children
- Relationships/to share their learning with peers

Resilience

- Returning to preschool following substantial period at home
- Participating in remote engagement (learning and relationships)
- Starting preschool under challenging circumstances (saying goodbye to parents at the door/temperature checks/access to reduced materials/awareness of dramatic changes and ongoing lack of predictability)

Innovation

- Using technology to provide ongoing curriculum engagement/support for parents/staff engagement
- Creating guidelines and policies (for staff and parents)
- Managing increased workload whilst prioritizing children's needs

Resilience

- Drafting policies/protocols despite ambiguity of guidelines
- Determination to ensure as little change to children's routine as possible
- Self-directed learning/upskilling regarding safety, hygiene and technology

Impact on ECEC educators





Conclusion and Way forward

- The sector has responded with innovation and resilience, sometimes making adaptations that appear to resist recommendations, for example, not using masks in the setting.
- At all times keeping central how children learn and develop.
- Wave 2 (June-July 2021)
Semi structured interviews and SDQs
- Wave 3 (Sept - Oct 2021)
Semi structured interviews and SDQs
- Wave 4 (Jan - Feb 2022)
Semi structured interviews and SDQs

"We are trying to get our children independent"

"The child said, 'don't tell me we have to go on Zoom again'"

"How can you tell a child, 'No, you can't go to the garden, because they're using it?'"

"The proportion of their life that they've lived with this, it probably feels very normal at this stage"

"...definitely a bit more expected of the parents"

"We do staff meetings still on zoom"

"I did the majority of the research myself"

"I do miss the parents..."

"...trying to make the outdoors like the indoor environment"

References and Acknowledgement

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We acknowledge Jonathan Lambert for his help with preparing the Microsoft Form for the SDQs.