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## **Prejudice and Participation - An Investigation into Challenges Surrounding Access to Early Childhood Care and Education for Children from the Traveller Community in Ireland**

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**Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Mumhan  
Munster Technological University**

**Prejudice and Participation**

**An Investigation into Challenges Surrounding Access to Early  
Childhood Care and Education for Children from the Traveller  
Community in Ireland**

**Denise Baker**

**A thesis submitted to Cork Institute of Technology in fulfilment of the  
requirement for the award of Master's Degree by Research in Early Years  
Education**

**Supervisors: Dr Judith Butler & Dr Joe Moynihan**


**Submission Date: January 2021**

## **Abstract:**

Travellers are a distinct cultural group, gaining ethnicity in March 2017 but who have traditionally experienced educational disadvantage (Pavee Point, 2018). This study examines the challenges that Traveller children encounter in accessing the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (DCYA, 2019) in Ireland. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is widely acknowledged as having a positive impact on children's holistic development, school success and later outcomes (Boyce *et al*, 2018; OECD, 2018, NCCA, 2009). This study is underpinned by the bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), which considers the child as a construct of their immediate surroundings and the larger beliefs of the society in which they reside. This research identifies, where Traveller Children are accessing ECCE and identifies the challenges faced by Traveller Children and their families in accessing ECCE provision. This research set out to identify the reasons for the poor uptake of Traveller children to the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019) and the challenges surrounding this from a parental and practitioner viewpoint. In-depth semi-structured interviews are the methodological approach used to examine these challenges. Findings suggest that there was an evolution in policy concerning Travellers from a focus on deficit and assimilation in the 1960s and 1970s to a growing recognition of Traveller culture and identity (DCYA, 2010, 2019). Difficulties surrounding Pobal's funding for the ECCE scheme was a concern for practitioners. Essentially, haphazard attendance of the Traveller child causes a major problem around funding compliance. Recommendations suggest that a more understanding approach in the area of policy is patent especially concerning Pobal's funding criteria for the ECCE Scheme (DYCA, 2019). Fundamentally, this research advocates for culturally sensitive ECCE provision, and recommends fully funded training for practitioners on this approach and in particular on diversity, equality, and inclusion so that not only the needs of all Traveller children are attended to but that their rights as human beings are also safeguarded.

# Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis for the award of Master's by research in Early Childhood Care and Education is entirely my own work except where otherwise accredited and that the thesis has not been submitted for an award at any other institution other than the fulfilment of the award named above

Signature of Candidate: 

Signature of Supervisors:  

**“What happens in childhood – like a child’s footprints in wet cement –  
commonly lasts throughout life.**

**Time does not heal; time conceals.”**

**(Felitti, 2009:131)**

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First and foremost, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr Judith Butler for her unyielding and continuous support, advise and encouragement and friendship throughout this research. This journey would not have been possible without her invaluable help, guidance, expertise and understanding. Additionally, my sincere thanks to Dr Joe Moynihan for all his help and advice.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support and understanding which enabled me to participate fully in this research.

## **Dedication**

**This research is dedicated to Traveller children everywhere who endure daily struggles that very few understand.**

He went to the life of the ribbon roads and the lore of the tinker bands:  
They chained my bones to an office stool and my soul to a clock's cold hands  
But I often thought of my tinker friend and I cursed my smirking luck  
That didn't make me a tinker man as I fought the road to puck  
With a red-haired wife and piebald horse and a splendid caravan  
Roving the roads with Carthys and Wards the O'Briens or the Coffey clan

'The Ballad of the Tinker's Son'  
Sigerson Clifford (1913 – 1985)

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# Glossary

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>AIM</b>	
AITHS	All Ireland Traveller Health Study
ACERT	Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers
ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
CERD	Covenant for the Elimination for all forms of Racial Discrimination
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DES	Department of Education and Science
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECI	Early Childhood Ireland
ESRI	The Economic and Social Research Institute
ITM	Irish Travellers Movement
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NACD	National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TNC	Travellers of North Cork
UN	United Nations
VTS	Visiting Teacher Service
WHO	World Health Organisation



# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

*“A part of this story is this process .... so that all may not be judged the same and painted as one” (Ward, 2009:5).*

This chapter sets out the background for the research and explains the theoretical underpinning of the study. It defines important concepts and definitions and sets out the aims and objectives providing focus and structure. There is a dearth of research on Travellers and ECCE so this is what makes this thesis of significance in the Republic of Ireland. The history of the Travelling people in Ireland is a history of trials and tribulations, a history of hiding in the mists of everyday life, peeping out only when necessary and disappearing once more into the shadows and this Joyce (2018) argues is why many settled people make assumptions without fact or knowledge and perhaps fear of the unknown. For many years in Ireland, the Travelling community was an integral part of country life, they lived alongside the farming community peddling their wares and trades, a welcome sight and asset. However, the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) (2016) posit the introduction of mass-produced products such as plastics tolled the death knoll for trades such as tinsmithing and saw the Travelling community pushed to the edges of large towns and cities with no supports or facilities. From the early 1960's in Ireland this has been the cause of much prejudice and discrimination being directed at the Travelling community from the Commission on Itinerancy's report in 1963 which viewed the Travelling Community as a problem that needed to be solved through rehabilitation, assimilation and integration to the Road Safety Act (1961), which banned camping on roadsides. The Irish Traveller Movement (2016) has argued that these laws along with the Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act (2002) which makes trespass on public or private land a criminal offence has, rather than seeing nomadism as a valid cultural expression, perceived it as a problem to be solved.

The ITM (2016) argue there was no acknowledgement whatsoever throughout the report by the Commission on Itinerancy (1963) of the culture, identity, language, customs, or values of the Traveller community. This can particularly be seen in terms of education for the Travelling community where figures from Central statistics office (CSO, 2017) based on the census of 2016 showing that alarmingly only 9% of Travelling children are reaching Leaving Certificate

with only 1% going on to 3<sup>rd</sup> level. It also highlighted that up to 80% of adult Travellers cannot still read or write and 80% are unemployed. According to the data from Pobal (2018), 25% of Traveller children (2,633), were attending an early years-service however, these figures also highlight that just under half of Traveller children in early years services availed of ECCE scheme (DYCA,2019) *'Just under half of Traveller children in early years services availed of ECCE (47%)'* (Pobal, 2018:53), even though as far back as 1970 the Department of Education and Science (DES) identified young Traveller children as a category that would benefit from preschool education by acquainting them with the routine of the school, thus making it easier for them to settle into primary school. Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2009), Siolta (CECDE, 2006) and the Diversity, Equality and inclusion Charter and guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DYCA, 2016) all advocate for inclusive practices for the benefit of children, their families and for society as a whole, however, despite this the inclusion of children from the Travelling community appears not to be prioritised.

## **1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the challenges that impact upon the Traveller child in accessing the Irish Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme (DCYA, 2010, 2019). The budgetary cuts of 2010 had a significant impact on the education of the Traveller child. The ECCE scheme was introduced in 2010 (DCYA, 2019) and is beneficial especially in terms of providing free access to mainstream preschool to all children, but on the other hand, the DES cut all the supports needed for Traveller children to successfully avail of the service. According to Bernard Joyce of the Irish Travellers Movement in his presentation to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills debate (2019), in 2011 Traveller specific supports were cut by 87% and included the withdrawal of the visiting teacher service, the withdrawal of the Traveller only Pre-school and related transport costs (now part of the mainstream ECCE), withdrawal of resource hours in primary schools and withdrawal of the enhanced capitation payments (Pavee Point, 2013).

These cuts according to Joyce (2019) came at a time when traveller education retention rates from primary to secondary schools in Ireland was at its highest and unfortunately they decimated the support infrastructure for Traveller education and have had a detrimental impact



on Travellers' educational progression. The ITM (2017) has noted that there has been no research in this area since these 2010 budgetary cuts and that as a result many Travelling children are entering primary school at a disadvantage which is impacting upon their continuing education and life choices.

This study aims to identify the challenges that Travellers children face in accessing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) as well as exploring the relevant literature and findings from appropriate research, reports, and surveys. It also aims to identify the reasons for the low uptake of Traveller children in the otherwise successful ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019) in Ireland. Three main research questions are posed

1. In what types of settings are Preschool Traveller Children accessing ECCE?
2. What are the challenges faced by Traveller Children and their families in accessing ECCE provision?
3. What challenges exist for the successful integration of Traveller Children to mainstream ECCE settings?

In-depth semi-structured interviews were the methodological approach used to examine these challenges with the intention of identifying the issues, gaps and flaws associated with same. The researcher conducted interviews with 10 parents from the Traveller Community and 10 practitioners partaking in the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019).

### **1.3 Rationale and Background**

*Travellers will be attending and attaining at all levels of education and have the confidence in their identity within a whole school environment where diversity is valued and where more Travellers view education as one of the valid means to fulfil their own potential' (Irish Traveller Movement vision for Traveller Education, 2011:2).*

The Irish Traveller Movement (2011, 2017,) firmly believes that education is a cornerstone to equality, it is vital for Traveller's integration but that an intercultural approach to educating Travellers within the Irish Education system which respects, recognises, celebrates and caters for diversity, is imperative. While progress has been made with the introduction of one year of ECCE (DYCA, 2019) (2010, increasing to 2 years in 2016) there remains a significant gap between the participation, attainment, and outcomes of Traveller learners in comparison to their settled counterparts. Specifically, 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left

school as compared to 13.3% nationally (Census, 2016). The Irish Traveller Movement (2011) contend that the 2010 budgetary cuts to Traveller education were short sighted and as a result undermined the Traveller child's potential future educational and career opportunities; it was because of these key issues that it was decided to research this topic in relation to the Traveller experience of ECCE

The Department of Children and Youth affairs (DCYA, 2019) funds the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) and state that early education for children aged from birth to six is an investment in future generations (DCYA, 2010). The OECD's (2010:5) report also states that 'early investment is vital' and they concur education is key, especially for disadvantaged children and can help to break familial poverty cycles and social exclusion (OECD,2009). Traveller-specific objectives were set out by the National Action Plan for Education (2016-2019). However, The ITM (2017) argued that there is no data available and that information on funding that was intended to promote participation for Travellers is unavailable. This plan had set out to achieve its goals within five years; that was over 10 years ago. The CSO (2017) figures subsequently show little change in educational attainment for Traveller children from previous CSO (2011) figures and the low enrolment of Traveller children in preschools was noted by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children (2016) as a concern with the ITM (2017) in agreement stating that the lack of research on this subject since the budgetary cuts of 2010 is discerning.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis and Chapter Outline**

The first chapter of this study introduces the key aims and objectives, the rationale behind the research and background information into the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) in Ireland. Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (DCYA, 2019) is an Irish government initiative, which entitles children (two years and eight months to five years and six months) to two full academic years education in ECCE (DCYA, 2019) settings for three hours a day, five days a week (DCYA, 2019) The chapter also includes the research questions and the method used to gather primary data.

The second chapter reviews relevant literature and outlines the theoretical framework for the study which is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio-ecological system theory. This theory examines how the child's development is affected by different environmental layers. Of these

layers the microsystem which includes the immediate family or caregivers and the child's school or day-care and the macrosystems which includes, children's rights, government policies, reports, documents and society and culture deal most with the Traveller Child's successful integration in and acceptance to the educational system in Ireland. A review of the relevant literature regarding the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019) and the challenges that Traveller children face in accessing this scheme is also included, such as the inspection processes. Relevant policy such as *Síolta* (NCCA, 2006), *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and the Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Guidelines (DCYA, 2016) are also reviewed in depth. This chapter also presents the impact prejudice and discrimination have on the lives of young Traveller children and how these issues influence future life choices. One of the main aims of this thesis is to seek out and explore the literature concerning Travellers and their experiences of education and in particular early education. It is, however, an area that does not yield much regarding relevant and contemporary research. Of equal importance is the fieldwork which examines the experiences of parents ECCE (DCYA, 2019) and practitioners regarding the experiences of accessing and providing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). The field work is non-random and illustrates and enhances the literature.

The third chapter describes the research methodology employed in this study and justifies the method of selection. This included in-depth interviews with 20 participants. These included 10 parents from the Travelling community and 10 practitioners offering the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019). In addition, this chapter details ethical considerations and how they were addressed.

The fourth chapter discusses the findings and subsequent themes which emerged from the interviews and from the literature review.

The fifth and final chapter provides an overall conclusion to the study while also identifying strengths and limitations of the research. This chapter also presents the recommendations for policy, practice and for future study with the aim of increasing the uptake of the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019) for children from the Traveller community in Ireland and enhancing their this experience.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

## 2.1 Introduction

*Early childhood education holds tremendous promise for raising a new generation, with each child not only proud of their own heritage and committed to standing up against bias in all its many forms (Carter and Curtis, 1994:112).*

This chapter identifies, discusses and critiques relevant and existing literature associated with the challenges that the Traveller community experience when accessing the Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) scheme (DCYA, 2019) in Ireland. It provides a comprehensive view of the prejudices that exist in Ireland in relation to the Traveller community in all aspects of their lives and critiques how these prejudices impact on the future life opportunities for children from this community. It commences with a brief history of the Irish Traveller Community and identifies existing literature associated with racism, discrimination, and the Irish Traveller. Employment discrimination, accommodation discrimination and health discrimination are all attended to while the existing data on the education of Travellers in Ireland is also explored. Attitudes, values and beliefs are implicit in the education system (Butler, 2003); therefore, the impact of the hidden curriculum is discussed, and the significance of reflective practice is emphasised. In addition, this chapter further identifies targeted government policy in relation to ECCE and highlights the importance of Irish National Frameworks for Early Childhood Education and Care including Siolta (CECDE, 2006) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and the Diversity Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for ECCE (DCYA, 2016). A review of the Childcare Regulations and the Inspections (DCYA, 2016) associated with ECCE provision is also presented. The European Commission (2010) stated that early childhood education is linked to the future of a sustainable and inclusive European economy, yet this study shows that up to 47% of Traveller children are not attending the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). In this chapter we will endeavour to explore the many areas of Traveller life that impact upon their educational attainment.

Over half of the Travelling Community's population in Ireland are children and almost a third are less than 6 years of age (CSO, 2017). Traveller children suffer the negative outcomes attached to being a Traveller as well as being a minority within the Travelling community that is, being a child, a minor who has no power and often no voice (Pavee Point, 2013). This study

investigates the attributing factors associated with the various social and cultural challenges that children from the Travelling community face in accessing early years education. While some progress has been made within Traveller education over the past number of years there remains a significant gap between the participation, and outcomes of Traveller learners in comparison to their settled counterparts (Irish Traveller Movement, 2011). Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (DCYA, 2019) is an Irish government initiative, which entitles children (two years and eight months to five years and six months) to two full academic years education in early years settings for three hours a day, five days a week (DCYA, 2019: np). The introduction of the ECCE scheme in 2010 was a step forward in the inclusion of Traveller children into a mainstream provision and away from segregation. Evidently, The Irish Traveller Movement (2011) argues that the subsequent budgetary cuts of 2010 which cut Traveller preschool funding significantly also cut transitional opportunities. The ITM (2011) further contend that these cuts to Traveller education are short sighted, undermine Traveller's integration and indeed potential future education and career opportunities.

Prior to 2010 preschool education for Traveller children was developing and becoming more inclusive especially with the introduction of the Siolta (2006) standards, the Aistear curriculum framework (NCCA, 2009) and the acceptance that Traveller children should have access to an inclusive, well resourced, well managed, high quality early childhood education (McNamara, 2006, Department of Education and Science, 2016; 2002).

CSO figures (2017) show 12,313 Traveller children aged 0-14 in the Irish Republic of which 5199 are aged between 0-6. However, The Early Childhood Stats series (2018) from Pobal (2018) inform us that there are 2,633 Traveller children attending Early Years Services in Ireland and that while according to this data from Pobal (2018) 25% of Traveller children, aged 0 to 4 years, were attending an early years-service, Just under half of Traveller children entitled to a place in the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2010, 2019) availed of ECCE (47%).

The ITM (2017) contend there has been little research since the budgetary cuts of 2010 and the low enrolment of Traveller children in preschools noted by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children (2016) is of concern as Traveller children are entering primary school at a disadvantage. This lack of discussion, research and debate has been identified by the ITM (2017) who advocate a comprehensive evaluation of the cuts in Traveller education should be implemented.

## 2.2 A Brief History of the Irish Traveller

Being a Traveller is a feeling of belonging to a group of people. Knowing through thick or thin, they are there for you, having support of family systems; having an identity (McDonagh, 2012:2).

The historical origins of The Irish Travellers as a group, has been a subject of academic and popular debate but research is complicated by the fact the group has no written records of their own (O Riain 2000). North *et al.*, (2000) argue that the origin of Travellers is genetically Irish with around 10,000 people in the United States being descendants of Travellers who left Ireland, mostly during the period between 1845 and 1860 during the Great Famine.

In 2011, an analysis of DNA from 40 Travellers was undertaken at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin and the University of Edinburgh. The study provided evidence that Irish Travellers are a distinct Irish ethnic minority, who separated from the settled Irish community at least 1000 years ago. Hayes (2006) informs us that Travellers are traditionally nomadic in nature, who are distinct from the general Irish population, this is due to factors such as “family structure, language, employment patterns and a preference for mobility” (Hayes, 2006:9). Notably, Travellers share a common ancestry, have fundamental cultural values and traditions, have their own language, and see themselves as distinct and different.

Travellers have particular interests in horses and dogs and having play related to these animals significantly helps Traveller children in terms of group identity and individual socialisation. Settings need to build their curriculum around children’s funds of knowledge and their sense of identity and belonging as expressed in the recent book on purposehood by Charni (2020).

The NCCA (2018) audit also lists important policies relevant to young children such as the Education Act (1998), Equal Status Act (2000), a social portrait of Travellers (2017, UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education, guidelines on Traveller Children in Primary School (2002), the Yellow Flag Programme, the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2008) Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015, the Private members bill and the Traveller and Roma Strategy.

Travellers in Ireland are often referred to by the terms ‘tinkers’, gipsies/gypsies, itinerants, or, pejoratively, knackers’ (Mulcahy, 2012). Some of these terms refer to services that were traditionally provided by the group such as tinkering or tinsmithing, for example the mending of tinware such as pots and pans, and knacking being the acquisition of dead or old horses

for slaughter. The term ‘gypsy’ first appears in records dating back to the 16th century when it was originally used to refer to the continental Romani people in England and Scotland, who were mistakenly thought to be Egyptian (Okely, 1983). Other derogatory names for itinerant groups have been used to refer to Travellers including the word ‘pikey’ (Preston, 2007). Notably however, Travellers refer to themselves as ‘Minkiers’ or ‘Pavees’, or in Irish as ‘*an Lucht Siúil*’ (the Travelling people).

*Some of my ancestors went on the road in the Famine but more of them have been travelling for hundreds of years – we’re not dropouts like some people think. The Travellers have been in Ireland since St Patrick’s time, there’s a lot of history behind them though there’s not much written down – it’s what you get from your grandfather and what he got from his grandfather (Joyce and Farmer, 1985:1).*

### **2.3 The Present-day Irish Travelling Community**

At present the Travelling Community are a relatively small group in Ireland, approximately 30,987, accounting for less than 1% of the population (CSO, 2017). Much research suggests that Travellers stand out as a group that experiences extreme disadvantage in terms of employment, housing, health and education (Pavee Point 2017; ITM, 2016; Watson et al., 2011; AITHS, 2010; Nolan and Maitre, 2008) and who according to MacGreil (2011) face exceptionally strong levels of prejudice. Fundamentally, the ITM (2016) suggests that prejudice especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge has eroded Travellers’ belief in their own identity. This is especially a concern for younger members of the Travelling Community and as a result the ITM have undertaken a number of initiatives to create a greater understanding and acceptance of Traveller culture in society where Travellers are able to express who they are without fear of discrimination from settled or Traveller communities. Included in these initiatives are, for example, The Traveller Youth Programme, The Traveller Education Advocacy Initiative and The National Initiative on Traveller employment. These initiatives involve the Travelling Community looking at diversity from within their own community.



Fundamentally, on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017 ethnicity was granted to the Travelling community by the Irish Government from An Taoiseach Enda Kenny stating,

*Our Travelling community is an integral part of our society for over a millennium, with their own distinct identity – a people within our people (...) As Taoiseach I wish to now formally recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation. It is a historic day for our Travellers and a proud day for Ireland (Kenny, 2017).*

This garnered a response from Pavee Point stating that, Travellers have always been an ethnic group, however, this is not something that was given recognition to them by the state or by others, nor was it a matter of choice for Travellers. Travellers are born with their ethnic identity (Pavee Point 2017). Pavee Point together with other Traveller organisations including the Irish Traveller Movement, the Irish Traveller Visibility Group and many others have lobbied locally, nationally, and internationally for more than 30 years for a formal state recognition of Traveller ethnicity. This was reinforced by recommendations from the UN treaty monitoring bodies, European institutions, Irish equality, and human rights bodies, and two cross-party Oireachtas Committees in 2014 and 2017. The concept of Traveller ethnicity remains a central issue for Travellers and one they believe has consequences for them not only in terms of cultural survival but also in terms of health and life chances (AITHS, 2010). The Equality Authority (2006) described Traveller ethnicity as a key factor that must be considered in identifying and responding to the needs of the Travelling Community. Indeed, the Equality Authority (2006) advocate that, Policies and programmes that respond to the needs of Travellers will only be effective when they take cognisance of the culture and identity of the group concerned. However in her evidence to the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality (2017), Emily Logan (Chief Commissioner of the Rights and Equality Commission) argues that the recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group was never in doubt as it was already enshrined in Ireland's equality legislation under The Equal Status Act (2000). This act defines the Traveller Community as the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified both by themselves and others as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the Island of Ireland. As a result of this, under the International Covenant for the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) the rights of people to identify as members of particular ethnic group is actively supported and it recognises the discrimination faced by Travellers as a discrimination that included identity denial (Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, 2017).

## 2.4 Racism, Discrimination, and the Irish Traveller

*Only multicultural mumbo-jumbo at its most fatuous crowns this dismal tribal phenomenon with the title "culture". For travellers today possess no distinctive art form, and even their traditional skills - such as tin-smithing - are almost extinct. Moreover, traveller values are overwhelmingly antithetical to individual happiness, personal achievement, or social duty. The world will be far happier when the traveller-tradition is hastened to a humane end (Myres, 2004).*

The ITM (2016) has recognised the denial of Traveller identity as one of the root causes of racism. McVeigh (2004) suggests that Irish Travellers have been directly affected by anti-nomadism and anti-Traveller racism in Ireland and in the context of this racism the state continues to insist that the existence of the Travellers rather than anti-Traveller racism was the problem (McVeigh, 2004). While there is a willingness to acknowledge that there is widespread prejudice toward Travellers in Irish society according to McVeigh (2004) there is a strong resistance amongst Irish society to calling the treatment of Travellers racist as there is a tendency to see racism only in relation to skin colour and therefore Travellers cannot experience racism because they are white and not a different race or nationality. This denial and confusion are evident in the following written submission by an Irish MEP to the Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia in 1990 stating that:

*Ireland is a racially homogenous country with no ethnic minority groups. As a consequence, there are no racial problems of the kind experienced in countries with such groups. Neither is there a large presence of foreigners ... the position could alter if the influx became sustained ... there is however a minority group of travelling people giving rise to some of the problems associated with racism. (O'Connell, 1997:5)*

This mistaken tendency to equate race with colour has been refuted by many, for example Charles Husband (2015), who refers to a quote from Charles Kingsley's (Canon of Chester Cathedral and Cambridge University Professor, 1819-1875) correspondence during his visit to Ireland in 1860 in which he stated,

*I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country, to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours (Husband (2015).*

Husband (2015) further expands that this reflects the racialisation process whereby members of a group, in this instance the white Irish are belonging to a race category on the basis of fixed characteristics which they are assumed to possess and central to this are notions of superiority and inferiority. Racism, as reflected in these references is more than just a prejudicial attitude it involves a pattern of social relations, structures and an ideological discourse which reflects unequal power between groups (O'Connell, 1997).

The practical side of ethnic recognition for Travellers according to Pavee Point (2017) would provide an opportunity for a new dialogue as to how the state interacts with Travellers including the fact that anti-Traveller discrimination would be explicitly named as racism, and this they state, has the potential to strengthen protection under current equality legislation which names Travellers as a protected group. Nils Muižnieks (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2016), during a visit to Ireland in 2016 was deeply concerned at the persisting social exclusion and discrimination Travellers were confronted with. He recommended in his statement that targeted measures, more targeted policy measures and effective involvement of Travellers is required to address the serious inequalities that continue to affect the members of this community in accommodation, health, education and in all other facts of life. This is evident in recent analysis on discrimination which found that Travellers are almost 10 times more likely than their settled peers to experience discrimination in seeking work (ESRI, 2017). This statistic is demonstrated in the CSO (2016) census figures which reports Traveller unemployment at 80.2%.

#### **2.4.1 Employment Discrimination**

Watson *et al* (2017) note that the high level of unemployment among Travellers as the main difference between Travellers and the settled community. These authors' further advocate that education is important and after accounting for the impact of education, the employment gap between Travellers and non-Travellers was dramatically reduced. Even though the gap is reduced it remains large at 1.9 times higher (ESRI, 2017). This, Watson *et al* (2017) suggests is a result of direct discrimination and he acknowledges that generalised prejudice undoubtedly plays a part. AITHS (2010) agrees and states that discriminatory practices and social exclusion

leading to a low self-esteem, poor performance in education and training sessions were named by Travellers as contributing to these low levels of employment. In this report (AITHS, 2010) many of the young people (Travellers) indicated that there was 'little point in staying in school because there was little chance of gaining paid employment afterwards because of the discrimination. The only way to get on and get jobs was to integrate, become like them and deny your identity' (AITHS 2010:11).

Murray (2014) suggests that experience from Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) on the ground in Ireland show that a minority of Traveller families bought into the promise that education would provide opportunities for work in the formal sector. The Traveller families involved complied and their children completed 2<sup>nd</sup> level education, often in very hostile environments and as a result many were disappointed. From this, many of the young Travellers applied for work and were rejected while others hid their identity and were accepted. However, according to Murray (2014), when Traveller identity was discovered they experienced exclusion, demotion, or loss of employment. Traveller Stereotyping and prejudice are so deeply rooted in European culture that they are often accepted as fact (ENAR & ERIO, 2011). Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards (2010) argue that Traveller life chances will not improve to any great significance if children grow up in a hostile world with embedded negative stereotypes in which they embody internalised oppression. Notably, research suggests that people who experience internalised oppression can believe that these negative messages are true and as a result this leads to mixed feeling about who they are and can curtail one's ability to form a strong sense of identity (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010). Murray (2014) agrees with this and expands that the negative effects of discrimination and oppression begin in early life and these lessons learned early have harsh consequences for life chances and relationships between communities.

McGinty and Lunn (2011) indicate that theories of labour market discrimination would suggest that discrimination in recruitment increases during recession, as many more candidates apply for jobs and employers can afford to be more selective. However, Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016), in their meta-analysis based on 43 field experiments conducted in OECD countries between 1990 and 2015, found no link between the boom/recession and discrimination against minorities in work acquisition. In Line with this Kingston *et al* (2015) (using self-reported data from minorities including the Travelling community) found considerable differences between national/ethnic groups in reported discrimination in Ireland, but no rise in perceived labour market discrimination against minorities during a recession. The limited empirical evidence,

albeit only on national/ethnic minorities seems to suggest that this does not change in line with the economic cycle (Kingston et al, 2015). However, in a meta-analysis of discrimination studies, Al Ramiah *et al.*, (2010) concur that implicit prejudice is a powerful predictor of subtle and informal discriminatory behaviour and where discrimination is unconscious or automatic they agree, it may be more robust to contextual change.

#### **2.4.2 Accommodation Discrimination**

A key feature of the Travelling way of life has been to Travel/nomadism. McDonagh (1996) describes accommodation for Travellers as just a stopping place, whether the stay is a long one or short term. From the 1960s onwards many Travellers moved en masse from rural areas to urban areas in search of work owing to the changes in Irish rural society, for example, the mechanisation of farming and the cheap availability of plastic making their traditional tin making industries obsolete (ITM, 2016). Traveller families living in camps on the fringes of cities and towns were viewed as problems which the government's 1960-1963 Commission on Itinerancy stated should and would be solved through absorbance into Irish society. A nomadic way of life does not fit in well with modern society where property is owned and status can be defined by the amount a person owns and as a result Travellers are finding their traditional halting sites built on or blocked by large boulders (ITM, 2016).

In addition to this the Road Safety Act (1961), which banned camping on roadsides and the Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act (2002) which makes trespass on public or private land a criminal offence has, rather than seeing nomadism as a valid cultural expression, perceived it as a problem to be solved (ITM, 2016). Smith (2014) argues that it was not until publication of The Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) that the distinct culture of Travellers as equal in value to the settled community was first acknowledged as requiring support in public policy and law reform focusing on the housing context. Notably, The Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) stated that the forms of prejudice and discrimination experienced by the Travelling community equate with racism in the international context and recommended introducing legal avenues to deal with the endemic forms of direct and indirect discrimination suffered by the Travelling community in general. This recognition was affected in law by including Travellers as a discrete protected group within the equality and discrimination law framework which was introduced in the late 1990s (Smith, 2014). Nonetheless, in 2006 the National Advisory Committee of Drugs and Alcohol (NACD) found

that 44% of settled people would not want Travellers to be members of their community. The Census of 2011 indicated that 12% of Travellers lived in temporary accommodation and this figure remained the same in the 2016 census.

More than 83% of the Traveller population are living in permanent accommodation but the ESRI (2017) indicate this type of accommodation is likely to be overcrowded and is more than likely standard accommodation which lacks central heating, piped water and sewerage facilities. The ESRI (2017) further expands that overcrowding is also associated with low levels of education and not being in employment. The ITM (2017) agree that poorly maintained sites with basic facilities have a huge effect on Travellers' health. Interestingly, Parry *et al.*, (1992) point out that many Travellers are pushed into housing despite it not being a culturally preferred option. In this they face problems of stress because 'housing is alien to them, leading to isolation from extended family, racism from neighbours and worse health than Travellers on sites' (Parry *et al.*, 2004).

### **2.4.3 Health Discrimination**

*'Life by life, missed opportunity by missed opportunity, we are increasing the gap between the haves and the have not's'* (UNICEF 2016).

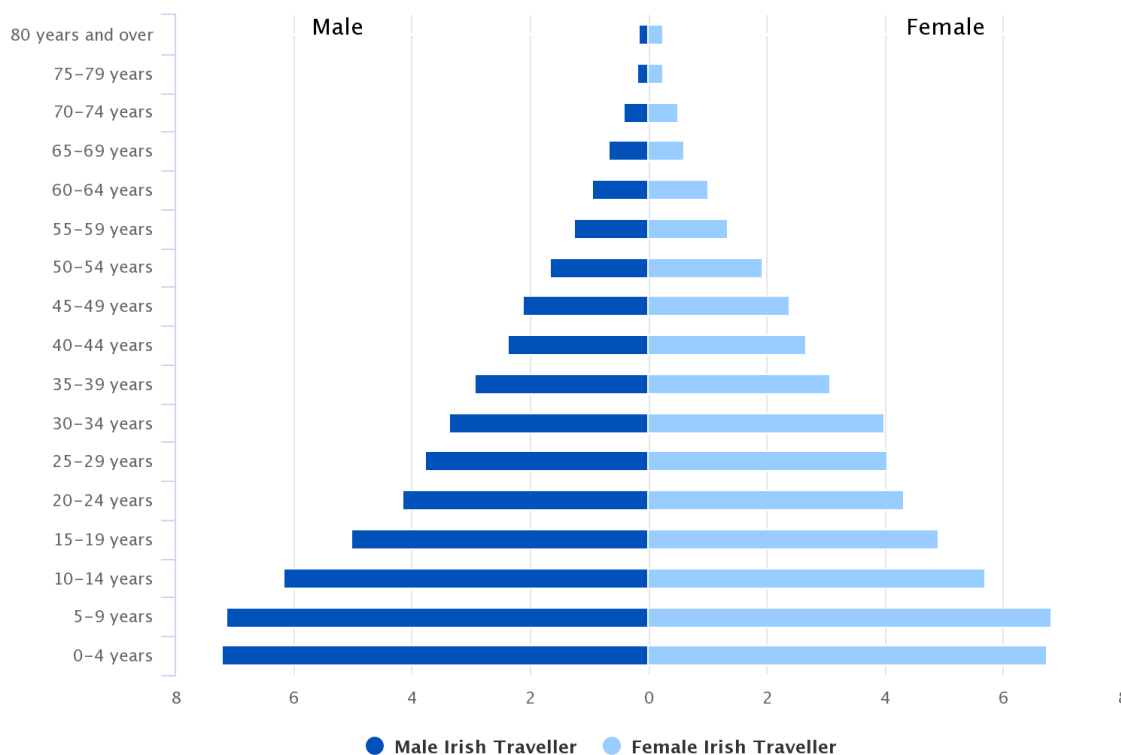
A range of factors have been identified as social determinants of health and these generally include; the wider socio-economic context; inequality; poverty; social exclusion; socio-economic position; income; public policies; health services; employment; education; housing; transport; the built environment; health behaviours or lifestyles; social and community support networks and stress (Farrell *et al.*, 2008).

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (2008) agree that a life course perspective provides a framework for understanding how these social determinants of health shape and influence an individual's health from birth to old age. People who are less well off or who belong to socially excluded groups tend to fare badly in relation to these social determinants. For example, they may have lower incomes, poorer education, fewer or more precarious employment opportunities and/or more dangerous working conditions or they may live in poorer housing or less healthy environments with access to poorer services or amenities than those who are better off, all of which are linked to poorer health (Institute of Public Health (2008). This is apparent from Ireland's census (2011) in which it was confirmed that the average age among Travellers

is 22 years compared to 36 years in the settled community. The findings show that half of all Irish Travellers are 20 years of age or under and that there are negligible numbers of Travellers over 50 years of age. The only realistic reason for this is premature death (AITHS, 2010). Figures from Ireland’s Census 2016 show little change and highlights the total number of Irish Travellers in April 2016 as being 30,987, representing 0.7 per cent of the general population. This figure was an increase of 5.1 per cent on the 2011 figure of 29,495. The population pyramid figure 2.1 (CSO, 2017) below highlights how the structure of the Irish Traveller population is quite different to that of the general population, with a broad base at the younger ages and reducing sharply at higher ages. Nearly 6 in 10 (58.1%) Irish Travellers are under 25 years of age (0-24) compared to just over 3 in 10 (33.4%) in the general population.

Figure 2.1 Irish Traveller by sex and age group, 2016 (CSO, 2017)

Figure 1.1 Irish travellers by sex and age group, 2016



Source: CSO Ireland

(CSO, 2017)

There were 451 Irish traveller males aged 65 or over representing just 2.9 per cent of the total, significantly lower than the general population (12.6%); the equivalent figures for females were 481 persons which represented just 3.1 per cent of the total, compared with 14.1 per cent for the general population.

Evidently, research suggests that the social conditions in which people live powerfully influence their chances to be healthy. Indeed factors such as poverty, food insecurity, social exclusion and discrimination, poor housing, unhealthy early childhood conditions and low occupational status are important determinants of most diseases, deaths and health inequalities between and within countries (World Economic Forum, 2018, 2017; Packer, 2017; WHO, 2004,). Indeed, the WHO (2004) asserts that health is influenced, either positively or negatively, by a variety of factors. Some of these factors are genetic or biological and are relatively fixed but according to Farrell *et al* (2008) the social determinants of health arise from the social and economic conditions in which a person lives. It includes the kind of housing and environments the health or education services we have access to and the incomes we can generate and the type of work we do. The World Economic Forum (2016) presented the impact stress has on a young child's brain. Stress they affirm caused by early experiences of poverty, homelessness and discrimination impacts the development of language, memory and self-control and these stresses cause the brain to react to the world accordingly. Alarmingly, the World Economic Forum (2016) found that by 24 months, many toddlers living in poverty already show both behavioural and cognitive delays. Thus, trauma is a significant factor in the lives of Travellers, and one sees this expressed in the disproportionate statistics in relation to, for example, domestic violence (McKeown, 2001) and in the constant threat of eviction.

Discrimination can affect a person's health and according to Williams *et al.*, (2003) experience of racist verbal abuse or physical violence can be related to a greater risk of premature death, high blood pressure, lower self-esteem, life dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies. In addition, The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) discusses that discrimination may be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination occurs where a person experiences exclusion or is treated less favourably than another on account of their membership of a particular group. The grounds on which direct discrimination occurs are listed as gender, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, colour, nationality, national or ethnic origins including membership of the Travelling community (McKeown, 2001; Williams *et al.*, 2003). Pavee Point (2005) assert that this form of discrimination is relatively overt and usually involves intent. The Task Force for the Travelling Community (1995) identifies direct discrimination as discrimination at the individual level. This they state is most common when a Traveller seeks access to any of a range of goods, services, and facilities, to which access is denied purely based on their identity as a Traveller. On the other hand, according to Pavee Point (2010) Indirect discrimination is less visible and does not



always involve intent. It is most visible in terms of the outcomes for groups in relation to services. It occurs where policies, practices, terms, or conditions apply which are unnecessary and which have a significantly adverse impact on a particular group.

The clearest example of indirect discrimination according to Pavee Point (2005) is the stark inequalities in health outcomes for Travellers. The health care services treat everybody equally, this responds to the needs of a certain proportion of the population but it assumes that the population are equal and have equal levels of literacy; language; education; information; and physical and financial access to services, therefore, it excludes marginalised groups (Pavee Point, 2005). Consequently, the context of racism experienced by Travellers has a relevance to health policy and provision in that racism introduces a stress and a crisis into the lives of Travellers that is detrimental to their health and sense of well being (Whelan *et al.*, 2010). The health status outcomes for Travellers are significantly worse than for the majority population and Institutions charged with health policy making and health service provision need to take action to guard against any potential for discrimination in the manner of their operation (The report on the review of Travellers Health, 2005).

Efforts to address inequalities in health must address the way in which the social determinants of health are distributed unfairly (Whelan *et al.*, 2010). Addressing the social determinants of health suggests ‘going beyond the immediate causes of disease’ and placing a stronger focus on upstream factors, or the fundamental ‘causes of causes’ (WHO, 2007). Baum (2007) points out that governments need a commitment to the values of fairness and justice and an ability to respond to the complex nature of the social determinants of health ‘beyond exhorting individuals to change their behaviour’ (Baum 2007:90).

## **2.5 The Education of Travellers in Ireland**

Educational disadvantage affects different demographics disproportionately in any society (Weir *et al.*, 2011). One thinks of children from repressed socio-economic families where there is not an established history of, say, finishing out secondary school and attending third level. Inner city areas are more affected than suburbs.

Irwin *et al.*, (2007) agrees that if the window of opportunity presented by the early years is missed it becomes increasingly difficult, in terms of both time and resources, to create a

successful life course. Hertzman and Boyce (2010) agree the foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, cognitive, social, and emotional are laid in early childhood. Yet as far back as 1998, the INTO claimed that a culture of disrespect has been a major problem for members of the Travelling community when accessing various services including education provision. According to Pavee Point (2013) poor accommodation, poor health and the experience of widespread prejudice and discrimination combine to create a particular set of circumstances that militate against many Traveller children participating fully in education. However, there are many other reasons for this and many of them are complex with external and internal factors at play, for example, in the past education policy favoured a segregated model of provision for Traveller children. In practice this meant that in many schools all Traveller children regardless of age were placed in one classroom with one teacher to teach them all. Arguably, Allport (1954) states the provision of segregated education led to missed opportunities in terms of interaction and learning across the social groups in line with social learning theories. The Social Learning Theory can be a worthwhile lens to view the importance of inclusion in the early years Sector (Cuddihy, 2014). Inclusion is seen as enabling participation in mainstream pre-school settings for all groups irrespective of ability or cultural background. The Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954), can be explained by “...sustained inter-ethnic contact can promote perspective taking and acceptance of and respect for difference” (Hughes, Campbell & Jenkins, 2011: 981). When applied to the pre-school sector, the Contact Hypothesis can arguably have the same outcomes when different groups, which have traditionally been segregated, are brought together for the purpose of education and care. The social learning that occurs during contact promotes empathy and respect for difference and leads to enhanced social inclusion. Just being admitted to the setting, though, is not enough, social learning needs to happen (Cuddihy, 2014).

‘An Inclusive approach to education is not just a matter of making minor (or major) adjustments; inclusion is a process, which has to run through the whole curriculum, if it is to be genuine (Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter 2016:70).’

Muro and Jeffrey (2008), assert that social learning theory is increasingly cited as an essential component for the promotion of desirable behavioural change. This theory is based on the idea that humans learn from interactions with others in a social context. Bandura (1977) posits that after observing the behaviours of others, people develop similar behaviours especially if their observational experiences include rewards related to the observed behaviour and this, Maggi

*et al.*, (2010) relates to, the fact that an understanding of child development is a social process of interaction between children and their environment. Skinner (1904-1990) argued that attempts to explain what someone does in terms of what is going on inside them are fruitless. On the contrary he insisted that feelings and thinking are kinds of behaviour and should be explained in terms of the environment (Packer, 2017).

Social inclusion is an important aspect in the success of young Traveller children's participation in ECCE (DCYA, 2019). Social inclusion concerns itself with values of human rights, citizenship, poverty, social and economic justice, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability.

This, Nutbrown and Clough (2006) argue is the drive towards maximal participation in and minimal exclusion from ECCE settings. The theory underpinning inclusion is seen as enabling participation in mainstream ECCE settings for all groups irrespective of ability or cultural background. In 1954 Allport described this theory as the *Contact Hypothesis*. The principle of this, he argues, is, if people have the opportunity to communicate with others, they will be able to understand and appreciate different points of view involving different ways of life and as a result prejudice should diminish.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, Parker (2017) explains the concept of Bandura's principle that humans are active information processors and think about the relationship between their behaviour and its consequences and furthermore, unless cognitive processes are at work, observational learning cannot occur. Therefore, the same way a child can learn aggression from observation, they can also learn prejudice. Danish and Russell (2007) have theorised that a child may imitate behaviour simply to replicate the outcome. If an action that an adult did looks interesting to a child, the child will imitate it to bring upon the same result, not necessarily regarding the intentions of a model. Russell and Thompson (2004) further found that the observer's attention is drawn to a particular object or part of an object by the activity of the demonstrator. In the case of the Bobo Doll Studies, the children saw the inflatable doll flying around the room and it looked like fun. The actions and words of the adults needed to be repeated or imitated to bring about this same scenario and according to Atlin *et al.*, (2011) It is probable that the children did not consider that they were hurting the toy.

Over the years, research has found the famous Bobo doll experiment conducted by Bandura demonstrated the way children observe the people behaving around them in various ways (Parker, 2017; Atlin, 2011; Bandura, 1977; Danish and Russell 2007; Bandura, 1961). The children observe individuals who were referred to as models and according to McLeod (2011) children are surrounded by many influential models, such as parents, extended family, characters on children's TV, friends, their peer group and teachers at school and practitioners in preschool/ECCE. McLeod (2011) further states, children observe these models and encode their behaviour and later children may imitate the behaviour that was previously observed. Allport (1954) argued that man is not born prejudiced it is a learned trait and he describes prejudice as a hostile attitude or feeling towards a person solely because he or she belongs to a group to which one has assigned objectionable qualities. Allport (1954) further contends that minor forms of prejudice such as spoken abuse have a way of growing into more virulent and destructive forms of discrimination and abuse. Therefore, teachers and practitioners are uniquely placed to influence the lives and actions of children and in doing this must be positive role models for all children as their attitudes, values and beliefs are implicit in the learning environment at all times (Trodd, 2016).

An audit of the research on ECEC in Ireland 1990-2003 found deficiencies in the Traveller preschool services in areas including management, funding, employment conditions, culturally appropriate provision, curriculum approach and parental involvement. However, despite these deficiencies, in 2001 there were 52 Traveller preschools indicating that service provision for this target group was perhaps more developed than generally thought (Walsh, 2003). Many of these preschools were situated in halting sites and facilitated by the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS). Notably, this targeted segregated provision was established in 1980 by the DES with the objective of bridging the gap between Traveller parents and educational providers. The VTS reached the most marginalised and nomadic of Traveller families and the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) acknowledged that few initiatives in the area of Traveller education have been as successful as the appointment of the visiting teachers.

### **2.5.1 Hidden Curriculum**

A curriculum is a formal document that outlines subjects within a formal course of study. Interestingly, Ritzer (2015) identifies the 'hidden curriculum' as a significant factor in

influencing children's understanding of themselves and others. Butler (2003) informs that the hidden curriculum refers to the indirect message's children receive about themselves or others. It refers to the attitudes and beliefs that are inherent in the learning environment and thus may have implications for children's behaviour towards one another. In other words, if children are taught in an environment where every child is accepted, welcomed, and valued, they will learn in turn to accept and value each other (Butler, 2018). Evidently, as Chambliss & Eglitis (2014) expand children learn about the world around them and indeed their role within it through their experiences within both school/ECCE and the wider social world which concurs with the bio-ecological systems theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1978). Fundamentally, children develop an understanding of the nature of society, including how to conform to social expectations, norms and indeed the consequences of not conforming (Ritzer, 2015). Chambliss and Eglitis (2014), further summarise that that the hidden curriculum is an 'unspoken classroom socialization to the norms, values and roles of a culture that a school provides along with the 'official' curriculum' (2014:86) and it is these 'messages' which are often not overt and are often unspoken which children internalise about themselves or others which may or may not be beneficial (Butler, 2003).

### **2.5.2 Reflective Practice**

Interestingly, John Dewey (1933:78) noted 'we do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience' and evidently, teachers/practitioners need to be aware of the conscious and unconscious components of learning from role modelling, so that the process is positive (Cruess 2008). Dewey *et al* (2013) explores how early childhood educators also have the experience of working with children with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as varying gender identities. Notably, Paige-Smith and Craft (2011) explain how teachers perceive and respond to the varying needs of children has a significant impact, and assert for example, when a teacher chooses to take a 'close working interest in a child with Down syndrome then other children are more likely to engage with them too' (Fox *et al.*, 2004 cited in Paige-Smith & Craft, 2011:74). These authors further acknowledge that similar results can be seen for a whole range of children (including children from ethnic minority groups) and conclude that 'put simply, inclusion begins with your attitude' (ibid: 75).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is also reflected in the thoughts of the US civil rights leader, Martin Luther King in the 1960's who advocated that laws cannot change what is in a person's heart, but they can change what they are able to do about what is in their heart.

Notably, Donohoe and Gaynor (2015) note that laws (in Ireland) were often passed in response to pressure from certain sectors of society and often due to EU/international pressure. Essentially however, as Martin Luther King noted, laws can indeed be circumvented and if we wish teachers/practitioners and children to move beyond hidden and not so overt biases then reflective practice is essential (Baldock *et al.*, 2011). Fundamentally, reflective practice has been identified by many researchers as being essential for quality practice working with and on behalf of children (Reed & Canning, 2012; Baldock et al 2011; Brockbank & McGill, 2007). In addition, Appleby (2010) argues that reflective practice is linked to empathy and seeing practice through the eyes of others which often necessitates questioning things that are often taken for granted. Evidently, this concurs with Dewey (1933) who asserted that those who work with children cannot simply rely on things just because they have always been done in the past. Craft and Paige-Smith (2011:3-4) succinctly point out that teachers/practitioners are increasingly expected to actively involve with the body of knowledge about their practice and that this necessitates a 'level of theoretical understanding about children's learning and participation in early years settings, and being able to reflect on how the literature, policy, and theory relate to practice'. Evidently, this suggests that early childhood practitioners are uniquely placed to influence children's lives (Trodd, 2016) and it has been asserted that practitioners have a unique opportunity to promote development and learning and they have the ability to provide a vision of what might be a very positive future for the child (Trodd, 2016; Ball, 1994; Clark, 1988). However, for the experience in ECCE to be successful much research suggests that a caring and supportive learning environment where children and their families feel accepted and welcome is essential. (Ghaye 2011; Schattmann *et al.*, 1992). Essentially, quality ECCE is largely dependent on the relationships with and between children. Responsive, caring relationships and connections with responsive adults who are positive role models are fundamental and can improve future outcomes. (Butler 2020, 2003)

Derman Sparks and Olsen (2019) in agreement state that at the hearth of this reflective practice approach should be the creation of an anti bias approach where children can blossom and all children's particular abilities and gifts can flourish. In concurrence the DCYA (2016) note an anti-bias approach to gender, race, ethnicity, disability, family structure and class can be built to ensure that approaches can be devised for children from the Traveller community where early childhood practitioners play a crucial role in sparking children's natural curiosity about differences and similarities in family life and community life.

### 2.5.3 Educational Disadvantage

Nugent (2010) acknowledges that in both Ireland and the UK it is not disputed that Traveller children reportedly suffer from the lowest rates of educational attainment of any group, and the provision of a quality pre-school service is one of the early preventable measures that policy makers can put in place. The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1999) advocated education as a primary vehicle by which people can lift themselves out of poverty, yet they state, ‘educational discrimination against and exclusion of minorities is perpetuating poverty and depriving people of fulfilling their potential’. Interestingly and in line with this is the fact that, of the 101 million children out of school and the 776 million adults worldwide who cannot read or write the majority are from ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities or indigenous people (Curtis, 2009). Early education and care are key tool to combat this form of social exclusion (Murray, 2012). However, in 2017 it was identified that 13.6% of Irish 15-year olds reported to not attending preschool and remarkably this appears to be well above the OECD average of 7.1% (OECD 2018). The OECD (2018) further evokes children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and in socio-disadvantaged schools were less likely to have participated in pre-primary education, yet as far back as 1970 the DES identified young Traveller children as a category that would benefit from preschool education by acquainting them with the routine of the school, thus making it easier for them to settle into primary school.

In 1982 the Department of Education, because of the special needs of the Travelling community appointed six visiting teachers in four areas of high Traveller population. These teachers acted as co-ordinators in their region and each teacher had access to approximately 200 Traveller families. This initiative according to the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers (ACERT) (1993) greatly increased the access to schooling in the areas they operated in. The VTS also created greater parent consultation and a support service for teachers (ACERT 1993). By 2011, there were 42 visiting teacher posts assigned to the Travelling Community in Ireland (Villareal & Wagman, 2001). The overall function of these was to promote, facilitate and support the education of Travellers from pre-school to 3<sup>rd</sup> level access. The ITM (2011) argue that this service provided crucial data collection on the progression of Travellers in education annually and that its disbandment after budget 2010 without consultation or review undertaken with Travellers or Traveller organisations was short sighted and undermined Traveller integration and potential future educational and career opportunities (ITM, 2011).

The abolishing of Traveller only educational supports marked a move towards an inclusive provision of preschool education for all children regardless of social standing, in agreement with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, (which Ireland ratified in 1992) states that all types of childcare provision should be equally available to all children.<sup>2</sup> This is mirrored in the government report (Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, 2006) which states that ‘The future provision of an early childhood education and care service for all young children, including young Traveller children, should be inclusive’ (McNamara, 2006:30). One of the aspirations of this report was that Traveller children would access and participate in mainstream early childhood care and education provision (McNamara, 2006). McNamara further asserts that ‘It is important that segregated provision be phased out, in a planned manner’ (McNamara, 2006:98). Unfortunately, it seems that this planned manner was rushed through after Budget 2010, with all Traveller preschools closed by Sept 2011, the withdrawal of resource teachers for Travellers by Sept 2011 and the disbandment of the VTS by Sept 2011. The decision to discontinue the Resource Teacher Service and Visiting Teacher Service, from September 2011, according to the DES (2011), was taken as part of the 2011 budgetary and estimates process and as part of a range of measures included in the National Recovery Plan 2011 to 2014, to secure expenditure savings in the 2011/2012 school year.

The ITM has said that the findings of a report published by the ESRI (2017) in which they conclude that education is key to improving the living circumstances of Travellers, comes as no surprise. However, this data is based on the 2011 census and according to the ITM it fails to measure the impact of the unprecedented cuts to Traveller education that occurred in the budget of 2010. The ESRI report (2017) which was funded by the Department of Justice and Equality, finds that prior to 2011 only 8% of Travellers reached their leaving cert year, but the ITM (2017) says research should be focused on the years after 2011 to measure the impact of the cuts to Traveller education from pre-school upwards. According to the ITM (2017) anecdotal evidence points to a rise in Traveller educational dropout rates in recent years, and research should be focused on objective measurement. Unfortunately, the data on Traveller

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<sup>2</sup> Objective K of the National Children’s strategy (2000) stated that ‘Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential’ (The National Children’s Strategy, 2000: 37).



children in Preschool education since the introduction of the free preschool year in 2010 is sparse.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.6 Targeted Government Policy in ECCE**

The scattered provisions for childcare support are complicated and difficult to navigate (OECD, 2015:60).

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999) – Ready to Learn – and published by the DES (1999) is concerned with children from birth to 6 years. It sets out the core objective of early childhood education as supporting the development and educational achievement of children through high quality early education, with particular focus on the target groups of the disadvantaged and those with special needs (DCYA, 2015). In Ireland Early Childhood education generally means education before the start of formal school or before the age at which children are generally required to attend school. The DES informs that children availing of the ECCE scheme should be between the ages 2 years and 8 months and 5 years and 6 months and that all children within this relevant age range can avail of two years of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). In practice, almost all 5-year-olds and about half of 4-year olds actually attend primary schools therefore early childcare education services include infant classes in primary schools and a range of childcare and preschool services (DES, 2020). The preschool and childcare services are regulated by Tusla, The Child and Family Agency (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2018). Every early year setting is subject to inspection from 3 different Government bodies, these are Tusla, DES, and Pobal. Tusla concentrates on child protection, the DES on quality in educational provision and Pobal on funding criteria. While these are necessary, they require the services to keep robust records and paperwork. In regard to children from the Traveller community these inspections can be a 2-edged sword for example you have the DES looking at quality provision and Tusla at the protection of our most vulnerable however Pobal's stringency on attendance can be a barrier for the acceptance of Traveller children and therefore preventing them the advantages that Tusla and DES provide in quality provision and protection. In June 2016, The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DYCA) introduced the diversity, equality and inclusion charter and guidelines for ECCE. The purpose of this was to support and empower service providers

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<sup>3</sup> In personal correspondence with the ITM on April 12<sup>th</sup> 2017, The ITM stated that unfortunately due to the cuts in Traveller preschool education they do not have a spokesperson for this area and as a result it is not included in the ITM strategy report on Traveller education 2017-2020.

to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every child can fully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education (DCYA, 2016). Historically in Ireland a multicultural approach came in the guise of festivals, exotic foods, dance and dress, whilst interesting and fun it had its limitations (ibid). With the introduction of the diversity, equality and inclusion charter and guidelines came a more in-depth and inclusive approach that recognises all children. This is known as the anti-bias approach and this has influenced practice internationally and was developed specifically for the ECCE (Murray and Urban, 2012; DES, 2011; French, 2007; OECD, 2006).

### **2.6.1 Irish National Frameworks for Early Childhood Education**

National Quality and Curriculum frameworks *Siolta*, (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear*, (NCCA, 2009) were developed for the Early Childhood Care and Education sector and these are designed to provide guidance and support for all those concerned with children from birth to 6 years. *Siolta* (CECDE, 2006) the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education was introduced on behalf of the DES to improve the quality of care in ECCE settings for children from birth to 6 years of age. In addition, *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009), the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for all children aged from 2 years and 8 months to 5 years and 6 months in Ireland was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to provide information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that children can develop and grow as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others (Daly *et al*, 2014; NCCA, 2010). Murphy (2014) acknowledges the requirement on state-funded ECCE settings who are offering the ECCE scheme (DES, 2019) to utilise both frameworks and further asserts that *Siolta* (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) complement each other, and essentially provide guidance and delivery of high quality service in ECCE settings and in infant classes in primary schools. Notably both frameworks acknowledge the uniqueness of children and the importance of the providing environments where all children are accepted, welcomed, and valued. NCCA (2019) argue that nurturing equality and diversity is important in early childhood care and education. By Promoting equality, they concur, a fairer society can be created where equality of participation enables children from all backgrounds to reach their potential.

Síolta (CECDE, 2006) is designed to assist all those concerned with the provision of quality early education in Ireland to participate in a developmental journey towards the improvement and enrichment of young children's early life experiences. It contains sixteen principles which closely align with those of Aistear and represent the vision which the NCCA states underpins and provides the context for quality practice in ECEC in Ireland. As such, it has relevance for the work of a wide range of early childhood care and education (ECCE) practitioners, irrespective of the context of their practice (Siolta, 2006). Introduced in 2006, Siolta (CECDE 2006) includes sixteen standards of quality for ECCE providers. These principles are, rights of the child, environments, parents and families, consultations, interactions, play, curriculum, planning and evaluation, health and welfare, organisation, professional practice, communications, transitions, identity and belonging, legislation and regulation and community involvement. The fourteenth standard, *Identity and Belonging*, is specifically concerned with supporting the individual and group identity of all children in diverse settings. Equality and respect for diversity are emphasised to be the crucial principles of quality care and education that ensures access to meaningful and respectful early childhood education services for every child to help them develop their unique capabilities (CECDE, 2006; DES, 2006). Smith *et al.*, (2003) argue that a sense of self is used as a reference point for understanding others and CECDE (2006) in agreement state that it is only after a child has established its own sense of self that she/he can begin to identify with other children and adults they encounter in the preschool setting on a regular basis. Allport (1954) theorising on the Nature of Prejudice argues that along with personal awareness children can build a comfortable and confident identity based on the multiple groups to which they belong (ethnic, gender, nationality etc..) without feeling superior or inferior to anyone else or any other group.

As a curriculum framework developed for ECEC at national level, Aistear (NCCA, 2009) does not subscribe to a particular pedagogical approach such as Montessori, Froebel, Steiner, or High-Scope. Instead, the framework is firmly rooted in research about how children learn and develop (European Commission National Policies Platform 2018). Aistear (NCCA, 2009), is built upon four themes of early learning and development which are wellbeing, identity and belonging, communications, exploring and thinking Identity and belonging as in the Siolta standards (DCYA, 2019) appear as one of the four key themes of the curriculum framework, emphasising its overarching importance for children's development through all activities and interactions in ECCE.

French (2013) argues that while Aistear promotes an inclusive experience for children and acknowledges the diversity of the preschool setting, it is not being implemented. French (2013) further posits this is because Early childhood settings are not mandated to implement Aistear as it is not underpinned by legislation. This may have an impact on the preschool experience for Traveller children as themes such as identity and belonging may not be implemented. The NCCA are moving in a positive direction with the undertaking of the 2019 audit of the Aistear curriculum framework to include Traveller culture and history. This the NCCA note is important as *'anecdotally, it seems that many Traveller children are not taking up places they are entitled to'* (NCCA, 2018:129). Rreview and further research they argue is needed into how Traveller children's sense of identity and belonging is supported in early years settings and how inclusive settings really are.

*'The transition from preschool to primary school is recognised nationally and internationally as a very important time in children's lives'* (O'Kane, 2016:12). The NCCA (2018) concur that a positive experience for children during the transition to primary school is important. The transitional programme introduced by the NCCA in 2018 called 'Mo Scéal' (My Story) is an initiative focused on making the experience as positive as it could be. The 'Mo Scéal' initiative strives to create a greater alignment in curriculum and pedagogy across preschools and primary schools with O'Kane (2016) stating that Aistear (NCCA, 2009) curriculum framework for ECEC should also be implemented as intended by NCCA (2009) as the curriculum framework for the first 2 years of primary school so that children from all backgrounds acquire the opportunity to avail of a curriculum that will encourage and understand equality and diversity. However, Grey and Ryan (2015) argue that while the importance of play is acknowledged in the primary school classroom the didactic teaching style remains with play given peripheral status.

As part of the National Childcare Strategy (2000), Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers were developed (Office of the Minister for Children, 2006). The guidelines are based on key principles of the anti-bias approach. They acknowledge from research evidence (UNESCO, 2017; Parker, 2017; Pavee Point, 2013; DES, 2006) that children may develop biases and prejudices at a very young age and underscore the important role of ECCE practitioners and service providers in empowering children to challenge these biases and be comfortable with difference. The anti-bias approach has influenced practice internationally (Smith, 2015; Wagner, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2013; Urban *et al*, 2011). It has also influenced practice nationally (Murray and Urban, 2012; DES, 2011-2013; French, 2007; OECD, 2006),

and was developed specifically for the early childhood care and education sector (DCYA, 2016). Thus, these guidelines present diversity and equality as an integral and continuing part of quality ECCE (Office of the Minister for Children, 2006).

The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education which was published by the DCYA (2016) tie in with the identity and belonging and diversity and equality Siolta (CECDE 2006) standards and Aistear (NCCA 2009) themes. The model is focused on empowering service providers to deliver an inclusive preschool experience, ensuring that every child can fully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education (DCYA, 2016). The DCYA (2016) further acknowledges the anti bias approach not only celebrates difference but also challenges the effects of inequality on particular children, families and communities, and asks that those engaged in the early childhood care and education sector at all levels work proactively in order to support, meaning full inclusion. These guidelines also recognise the importance of supporting majority children and families to be comfortable with difference and be aware of inequality in society. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2017) the central message is simple. 'Every learner matters and matters equally' (UNESCO, 2017:12). The complexity arises; however, they stress when we try to put this message into practice. Implementing this message will likely require changes in thinking and practice at every level of an education system, from classroom teachers and others who provide educational experiences directly, to those responsible for national policy (ibid).

The Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU) in the Department of Education and Skills is co-located with the DCYA to ensure that policy developments in the early childhood sector are developed within an overall strategic policy framework for children. The EYEPU has responsibility for the following: Implementation of Siolta, Implementation of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector, Targeted early years interventions for children who experience disadvantage, including the Early Start Programme and the Rutland Street Project, Provision of policy advice and representation on national and international ECCE policy development initiatives.

## **2.6.2 Diversity Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for ECCE (DCYA, 2016)**

‘An inclusive environment, where equality is upheld and diversity is respected, is fundamental to supporting children to build positive identities, develop a sense of belonging and realise their full potential’ (DCYA, 2016: IV).

The Diversity Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for ECCE (DYCA, 2016) were introduced in Ireland in 2016 by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). This Charter has been developed in line with international best practice and has drawn on the experiences of Europe and the USA, as well as Canada and Australia (DCYA, 2016). The anti-bias approach was adapted to the Irish context by the Eist Project (2002-2010) in Pavee Point. Connelly *et al.*, (2009) suggests, from a young age, children display both positive and negative attitudes and preferences, especially Milner (2010) concurs with respect to all types of diversity, including gender, disability, and ethnicity. In keeping, this approach, the DCYA (2016) agrees connects well with both the Síolta (2006) national quality framework and the Aistear curriculum framework. The principles of Síolta (2006) state that equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education, and that quality settings respect diversity where children can have their individual, personal, cultural, and linguistic identity validated. Similarly, nurturing equality and diversity is one of the 12 principles of Aistear, and identity and belonging are one of its four themes.<sup>4</sup>

## **2.6.3 Anti Bias Approach**

Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards (2010) point out that anti-bias education also reflects the basic human rights included in the United Nations Declaration on the rights of the child (1989)

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<sup>4</sup> The ‘éist’ project was then funded under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and the Bernard van Leer Foundation (2000- 2004). ‘éist’ developed, piloted, evaluated and accredited a diversity and equality training approach for the early childhood sector. The project continued to engage at advocacy and policy levels including consultation on the development of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006), the Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (2006), guidelines for CCCs to include a focus on diversity in their work-strategy, and equality proofing Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2010) for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

which Ireland ratified in 1992. These include the right to survival; the right to develop to the fullest; the right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and /or exploitation; the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2011) acknowledged the continuing need to combat discrimination against Travellers and to commit to improving the range of positive action measures already in place to support them while accepting the need to respect Traveller culture and identity. In agreement, DCYA (2016) stress the negative and racist representations of Traveller families can have a detrimental effect on Traveller children and as a result of this, children who are formulating their own self-identities can from a very early age transfer negative and inaccurate attributes unto themselves. Therefore the DCYA (2016), in these guidelines, necessitate finding ways of making the unfamiliar, familiar and building bridges between the early childhood service and the children's home culture which in turn will help shape the views of both Traveller and settled children. Notably Murray and Urban (2012) posit that getting the message that you are either inferior or superior is not healthy for either group of children and this Boyle (2006) concurs is particularly precarious if you have a teacher that doesn't like Travellers as it can affect how she speaks to the child and how she acts with the child. As a result of this the other children in the setting then pick up on how the teacher is approaching this child (ibid).

#### **2.6.4 Childcare Regulations and Inspections (DCYA, 2016)**

Regulations have become the guiding force in daily practice in childcare environments. The aim of the Child Care Regulations (DCYA, 2016) is to achieve quality outcomes for children through encouraging a more holistic and reflective approach to service delivery. In Ireland it is the responsibility of each preschool setting to take measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the children in their care and to comply with the Child Care Act 1991 (early Year's Services) Regulations 2016. Under the Child Care Act 1991 as amended by the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is charged with ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pre-school children attending services. Pre-school children are defined by law as children under 6 years of age, who are not attending a national school or equivalent. Pre-school services include pre-schools, play groups, day nurseries, crèches, childminders, and other similar services looking after more than 3 pre-school children.

The Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) is an announced inspection to early years services who are providing the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE). These

inspections are carried out by the DES. The focus of the inspection is to evaluate the nature, range, and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children aged 2 years 8 months up to the age of 5 years 6 months and are underpinned by quality frameworks. These inspections reflect the Siolta (DCYA, 2019) the early years quality framework and Aisear (NCCA, 2009) the Curriculum framework and The Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines (DCYA, 2016).

The revised childcare act was launched on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The regulations consist of nine key areas and seven schedules which consist of application forms and additional information. The following are the key features of these regulations:

### **Garda Vetting**

All employees, unpaid staff, and contractors (e.g. Gymboree, Stretch and Grow etc.) must be vetted before having access to children in line with The National Vetting Bureau (children and vulnerable persons) acts 2012 and 2016. These acts require that the following is adhered to:

Police vetting (from the country or countries) is also required for those who have lived outside of Ireland for a consecutive 6-month period.

Services should ensure that a policy is in place on how to respond to vetting disclosures.

Vetting disclosures must be kept on file for 5 years from an employee's start date.

For more information please see our Garda Vetting section.

### **Qualifications**

Each employee working directly with children must hold a minimum qualification of a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National

Qualifications Framework by the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2016.

This does not apply to those who have signed a Grandfathering Declaration (on or before the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2016), or those in possession of an exemption letter from the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.



## Policies and Procedures

Schedule 5 of the Regulations outlines 21 specific policies, procedures and statements which must be included in a services Policies and Procedures document. These are:

Statement of purpose and function	Healthy eating
Complaints	Outdoor play
Administration of medication	Overnight services (if applicable)
Infection control	Staff absences
Managing behaviour	Internet, photographic and recording devices use
Safe sleep	Recruitment
Fire safety	Risk management
Inclusion	Settling in
Outings (if applicable)	Staff training
Accidents and incidents	Supervision
Authorisation to collect children	

Early Childhood Ireland (2016).

Policies need to be reviewed at intervals of not more than one year, and records of each review need to be kept for 3 years after a review is carried out.

## Information and Records

The following records must be stored for 2 years from the date a child last attends a service:

- Children's attendance records
- Records of administered medicines
- Accident and injury reports
- Staff rosters

### 2.6.5 Early Start Programme (DES, 1994)

According to the DES (2014), preschool education for disadvantaged children was introduced through what is known as *Early Start Programme* on a pilot basis in 1994. Its overall aim is to expose children aged from 3 to 5 years from disadvantaged areas to a positive pre-school

environment which the DES (2014) asserts would improve their overall development and long-term educational experience and performance. Initially, 8 schools in disadvantaged areas in Cork, Limerick and Dublin were selected and Early Start units were established in vacant classrooms in primary schools. Presently there are 40 Early Start programmes running in primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage (DES 2014).

Corrigan (2002) describes the programme as a one-year intervention scheme to meet the needs of children, aged between 3 years and 4 years, in September of the relevant year, who are at risk of not reaching their potential within the school system. The project involves an educational programme to enhance overall development, help prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage (Mhic Mhathuna & Taylor, 2012). Parental involvement is one of the core elements of the programme in recognition of the parent/guardian as the prime educator of the child and to encourage the parent/guardian to become involved in his/her child's education (DES 2014). Working in conjunction with the school's Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator, the Early Start teachers encourage parents to take part in the centre's activities. A rota is agreed, and parents take turns to spend time each week in the centre. The curriculum of the programme prioritises the four core areas of language, cognition, and social and personal development. This is done by engaging the children in structured play activities, aimed at enhancing their development in the core areas. Within these play activities, teachers set specific learning objectives for each child. Play and positive adult-child interaction are the cornerstones of the Early Start activities. After completing the Early Start programme, children proceed to the junior infant class. The teachers are fully qualified primary school teachers and are assisted by a childcare worker (Corrigan, 2002).

Early childhood intervention programmes such as the Early Start are, according to RAND (2005) designed to mitigate the factors that place children at risk of poor outcomes. Indeed, such programmes attempt to provide support for parents, the children, and the family as a whole (ibid). These supports may be in the form of learning activities or other structured experiences that affect a child directly or that have indirect effects through training parents or otherwise enhancing the care giving environment (RAND 2005). Internationally, In New Zealand the findings of a 9 year follow-up report on their Early Start initiatives concludes in 2012 that as a general rule, families provided with Early Start were families facing multiple disadvantages and the major benefits of Early Start for these families seemed to be improvements in child related outcomes including health care, parenting and behaviour

(Fergusson *et al.*, 2012). However, an important issue raised by these findings concern the extent to which Early Start had benefits for children from ethnic minorities such as the Maori (Durie *et al.*, 2010; Smith, 1999). For this reason, efforts have been made to ensure Early Start be delivered in a culturally appropriate way to compare the outcomes for both Maori and non-Maori families. The findings of these comparisons showed the outcomes for Maori and non-Maori families were similar. Therefore, Fergusson *et al.*, (2012) concur well delivered, culturally appropriate programmes such as Early Start may have similar benefits for all children involved.

The DCYA (2013) stresses that ensuring equal access and inclusion for all children requires that services challenge prejudice, respect the differences between children in their abilities and backgrounds, and positively support every child's identity and sense of belonging. The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (2013) argues education and training that enables professionals to understand the importance and impact of inequities, is essential to enabling disadvantaged children and their families to benefit significantly from high quality ECCE settings (Gambaro *et al.*, 2014; OECD, 2011).

#### **2.6.6 Preschools for Travellers**

Preschools targeted at children from the travelling community developed in the dual context of Government policy regarding the education of Travellers and the emergence of international research in the 1960s (Boyce, 2018). Evidently, research identified the possible benefits that might be gained from high-quality preschool intervention for children from the Travelling community which aimed at compensating for educational disadvantage within communities (Rafferty, 2014; Hayes and Bradley, 2006; DES, 2004; DES, 1999). It had become apparent in the wake of the Report of the Commission on Itinerancy (Government of Ireland, 1963) that Travellers were not receiving adequate formal schooling. Following on from the Commission, volunteer Itinerant Settlement Committees were established across the country (Fehily, 1974). One activity of these committees was to set up classes, staffed by volunteers, to teach Travellers to read and write.

The DES offered financial support for preschools for children from the Travelling community and various voluntary groups applied for it and established preschools around the country

(Nunan, 1993). The funding initially consisted of 70% of the teacher's salary, plus transport costs for the Traveller children. In 1984, the Department increased its funding for the teacher's salary to 98% and it also paid an equipment grant. While management committees were advised to hire qualified primary school teachers, this was not always possible because of the relatively poor conditions of service in the preschools compared to primary schools (INTO, 1992). The Department of Education left it to the discretion of the management committee to hire a suitable person where it did not prove possible to recruit a primary school teacher. The preschools opened for three hours a day for 185 days a year and were staffed by a teacher and a childcare assistant. No curriculum guidance was provided by the Department (ibid). Boyle (1995) found that teachers engaged in a wide variety of activities, including circle time, table-top activities, stories, music and movement, sand and water play and she went on to conclude that it was clear that children in the preschools for Traveller children engaged in stimulating activities appropriate to their stage of development. In the 1980s, there was an expansion in the number of preschools. By 1988 they numbered 45, fifteen of which had been sanctioned by the Department of Education in 1987 (Dwyer, 1988). In 1992, the Department introduced in-service training for teachers in Traveller preschools. This initiative created an opportunity for the teachers to develop skills and to share ideas, and it also provided a forum which reduced the isolation in which they worked. This isolation of preschools from each other, and the lack of direct involvement of the Department, had led to policy implementation varying greatly from one preschool to another (Nunan, 1993). The establishment of the Traveller-only nature of the preschools was at the direction of the Department of Education, which wanted to ensure that funding was targeted towards Traveller children. This separate provision was supported over the years by Traveller parents. For example, Catherine Joyce, a prominent Traveller activist, spoke of her own support and that of other Traveller parents to whom she had spoken. She claimed that Traveller children felt more secure and that they developed confidence in a preschool where they were with other Travellers (Boyle 1995). Also, the Task Force on the Travelling Community regarded Traveller preschools as having a positive role in introducing small children to a new environment and saw their potential to act as a bridge in preparing the children for integration at primary level (Government of Ireland, 1995).

The Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) recommended that an evaluation of Traveller preschools be carried out. This was carried out during the 2001/2002 school year and presented in 2003. The evaluation dealt with a range of areas, with its primary stated purpose being to promote good practice in Traveller preschools. It noted a lack of clarity about who

held responsibility for the preschools, and it recommended that this weakness be addressed. It also found the existence of a tension between the efforts at inclusiveness within society and the existence of separate provision, advising that ‘the location of further preschools in places that mark them out for the exclusive use of Travellers should be avoided’ (DES, 2003:35). The evaluation found that only a few preschools had parent representatives on their management committees and recommended that ‘membership of the management committees should include Traveller parents elected by parents of children attending the preschool’ (DES, 2003:78). It also suggested a range of mechanisms for parental involvement, which should be carefully chosen and be sensitive to Traveller culture. In addition, the OECD (2004) recommended that Traveller parents and their organisations should be involved in many aspects of Traveller preschools. However, no resources or training were provided by the DES to support the implementation of parental involvement in the preschools.

Attitudes towards the ECEC changed with the adoption by the state of the Traveller Education Strategy (DES 2006a,) which recommended that no new Traveller preschools should be established and that Traveller children should be catered for through general preschool provision. It was recommended that ‘Traveller children should have access to an inclusive, well-resourced, well-managed, high quality early childhood education, with an appropriately trained staff, operating in good quality premises’ (DES 2006a:32). It was further recommended that the phased amalgamation of Traveller-only preschools with existing and future early childhood education services be undertaken. It was envisaged that half of all existing Traveller preschools would be amalgamated within five years, and the remainder within ten years. In fact, Traveller preschools were forced to close before the deadline envisaged in the Traveller Education Strategy, and no effort was made to amalgamate different preschool services. The DES withdrew funding from Traveller preschools, and they closed in summer 2011. At the same time the DES was withdrawing funding for Traveller preschools, another initiative in early childhood education came about. In 2010 The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs implemented a universal preschool provision scheme providing a free preschool year for all children of the relevant age.

### **2.6.7 The Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE Scheme) (DCYA, 2019)**

In the 2009 Budget the Irish Government introduced a new initiative to take effect from January 2010. This was to provide a ‘free pre-school’ year in the ECCE setting for all children. The ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) was a significant development for a number of reasons, particularly as it was the first time that qualifying ECCE services received a direct payment from the Government and that it was a universal scheme available to all qualifying children (Daly *et al.*, 2014; Neylon, 2012; Hayes, 2010). The acknowledgment of the importance of ECCE being the first experience of formal education and social development outside of the family home was significant (DCYA, 2010). The ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) is voluntary and the DES (2012) stated that 94% of eligible children were enrolled in preschool services for the 2011/2012 school year. Children who availed of this service and were aged between 3 years and 3 months and 6 years could attend their choice of preschool for 3 hours per day, five days a week over 38 weeks at no cost to their parents or guardians (*ibid*). The scheme was a major success in terms of uptake as the number of 3- and 4-year olds attending pre-school services increased significantly (Taylor, 2012). Indeed, the DES (2012) maintains that with more and more children attending pre-school services the focus on transitions to primary school can be strengthened and it is a step forward for the sector to promoting social inclusion and development (Neylon, 2012).

The 2018 Budget was significant for the ECCE sector as it increased the ‘Free preschool year’ to two years or 76 weeks for children from 2 years and 8 months to 6 years. In confirming this, the Minister with responsibility for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone stressed the importance of the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019), stating the pre-school services on offer are an integral part of growth and development, a key phase of children’s lives in the same way as primary and secondary school and the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme in 2017 will be a major breakthrough for families – it will ensure everyone is treated equally (DCYA, 2017) and all children will be entitled to a full two years of the ECCE scheme or ‘free preschool’ as it has become known. This closes a loophole that had prevented some children who had not turned three by September from accessing the scheme until January or April of the following year. The scheme is open to children from the age of two years and eight months, and the measure will expand the service to 76 weeks for all qualifying children (DCYA, 2017). There will be continued investment in the childcare affordability measures that came into effect in September 2017. This saw the introduction of a universal, non-means tested subsidy of up

to €1,040 per year for children up to the start of the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). Figures released on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017 showed that the affordability measures had already, in the first six weeks of the schemes opening, benefitted some 45,000 children. A total of 24,000 of these registered by October 2017 for the universal scheme (age criteria - 3 years and 8 months to 5 years and 6 months). Separately, 21,000 have registered for the targeted schemes. Additional funding announced on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 will see the door remaining open for further children and families to register and benefit from these subsidies throughout 2018 (DCYA, 2018). Start Strong (2009) stresses the importance of public investment in young children and family supports stating that high quality, affordable care and education in early childhood matters for future economic growth, for a fairer more equitable society and for children's development (ibid).

## **2.7 Early Childhood Development**

Boyce *et al.*, (2018) refer to early childhood development as a critical time of rapid growth that takes place in a human life between conception and age six. During this time the central nervous system is developing, and the child is gaining the basic skills and competencies which will be necessary throughout life (Boyce *et al.*, 2018; OECD 2017; Packer, 2017). The OECD (2017) further concur this is a time when children learn at a faster rate than any other time in their lives, developing basic cognitive and socio-emotional skills that are fundamental for their future achievements in school and later on as an adult. Moreover Boyce *et al.*, (2018) argue that beyond the cultural traditions that affirm childhood as a period of special and lasting importance early developmental experiences and exposures become neurobiologically instantiated in the brain and genome, thereby affecting trajectories of health and development for the remainder of life. Before birth the child's neurosystem is pre-programmed to develop various skills and neuropathways and during the first six years of life Dawson *et al* (2000) explain these neurosystems develop in response to external physical and social stimuli and the extent to which healthy development takes place is thereby influenced by the environment to which the child is exposed. Early childhood development is a multi-dimensional construct referring to the physical, social, emotional and cognitive health and well being of the developing child (Walker *et al.*, 2011).

Fernald *et al.*, (2012) explains that child development and learning begin at the point of conception. Young children's development and learning at the start of school is just an extension of a trajectory that begins at conception. Inequities in children's cognitive and language development are apparent as early as four months of age (Fernald *et al.*, 2012), and tend to widen, not decrease, over time. Interpretation of data on child development and learning at one point in time, such as the start of school, should be based on a view of children's development that begins at birth, as science would suggest that inequities uncovered in measurement at the start of school begin several years earlier and are the result of cumulative risks and lack of environmental stimulation in the early phases of life (Raikes, 2016). Environmental influences also have a profound impact on development and therefore according to Raikes (2016) basic patterns of human development and expression of individual traits are governed by genetic information that leads to commonality in developmental patterns in all people, such as the acquisition of early language and communication and the first expression of cognitive problem-solving skills. Human development reflects unfolding of genetic potential in response to environmental cues. Nearly all human traits, skills and competencies reflect an interaction of genetic information with environmental stimuli, with some traits being more strongly influenced by either environment or genes than others, but all reflecting a complex set of interactions between genes and environment (National Research Council, 2000; Van Ljzendoorn-Bakersman, & Kranenburg, 2011). In this way, both the expression of genes and the underlying genetic information itself, which in turn influence all of development (including cognitive development) are profoundly affected by emotional stress, exposure to environmental toxins, health status and nutrition (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). Raikes (2016) concludes the influence of these factors on development and learning continues throughout life but with a more profound influence in early childhood.

### **2.7.1 The Importance of Early Childhood Development**

Worldwide, 10 million children under the age of five die annually and a further 200 million children do not achieve their full developmental potential (WHO, 2009). In addition, WHO (2009) further expands that premature death in childhood is most evident in low and middle-income countries. Riordan (2011) argues that even in high-income countries despite unprecedented economic growth and technological development, in the past 50 years many children have unacceptably poor health and social skills. Riordan (2011) further explains that



the relationship between parental education and children's achievement has remained relatively stable during the last fifty years, whereas the relationship between income and achievement has grown sharply. Family income is now nearly as strong as parental education in predicting children's achievement (ibid). Moreover, the gap between children from lower and upper income families is widening which according to Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) results in children from poorer backgrounds doing less well in school and entering into an inter-generational cycle of reduced employment opportunities, higher fertility and health inequalities.

By the time a child reaches 6 years of age, his/her brain is 90% the size of an adult (Packer, 2017), therefore the importance of parents in a child's early development is pivotal (Packer 2017; Ceka and Murati, 2016; Murray, 2012). Education commences for a child in the first days of life (Labinska, 2006). In this regard the parents play the role of direct leaders as well as supporters of the implementation of the education of their children (Ceka and Murrati, 2016). Moreover, Ceka and Murrati (2016) report that when parents involve themselves in the educational process of their children the outcome can usually be qualified as a positive and encouraging one. The findings of research support the importance of parent-child book reading as a means of promoting the vocabulary development of children and Farrant *et al.*, (2013), Brinkmann, *et al.*, (2013) and Mol *et al.*, (2008), agree that language acquisition is an integral component of school readiness. However, the CSO (2012) state that 80% of Traveller parents cannot read or write and alarmingly in 2017 it was identified that 13.6% of Irish 15-year-old reported to not attending preschool. Remarkably this appears to be well above the OECD average of 7.1% (OECD 2018). The OECD (2018) further evokes children from lower socio-economic backgrounds including ethnic minorities were less likely to have participated in pre-primary education even though the DES (1992) identified young Traveller children as a category that would benefit from preschool education due to low levels of parental education leading to a lack of educational developmental opportunities in the home (DES, 1992).

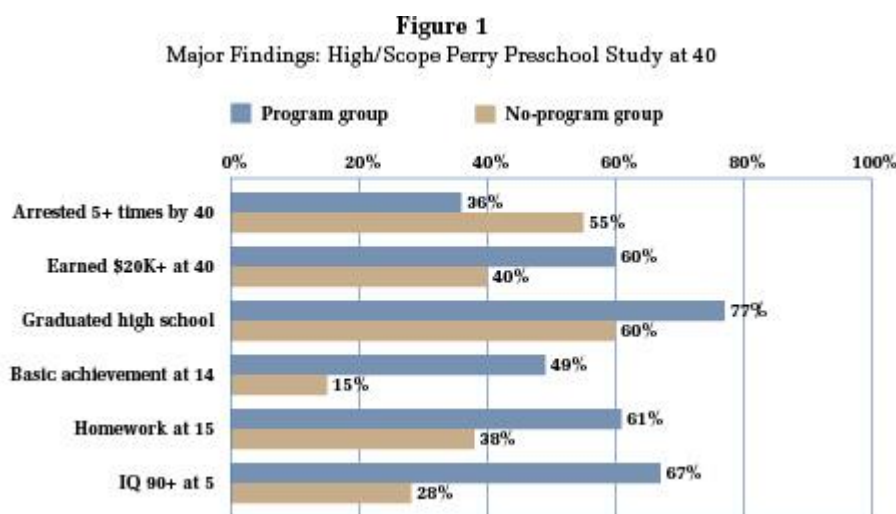
In keeping with examples of poor educational outcomes for children from ethnic minority backgrounds and in the international context, studies from Australia show that educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain well below that of non-indigenous children (Language and Numeracy conventions, Australia, 2013). Indeed national surveys have found that Australian Indigenous children are more than twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable than non-Indigenous children at the beginning of formal schooling (Australian Government, 2013) and according to Brinkman (2013) the literature indicated that

these differences at the beginning of children’s formal schooling have significant implications for their subsequent educational outcomes. Moreover, Farrant *et al.*, (2014) argue the low literacy levels of parents and the oral nature of the Australian Indigenous culture has led to implications for the early development of Australia’s Indigenous children.

Research has been consistent in its findings that Early Years Education is beneficial for children in continuing education and positive life outcomes (OECD, 2018; UNSECO, 2017; Packer 2017; Ceka and Murati, 2016; Murray, 2012; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). The Perry Preschool Project is an example of this. From 1962–1967, at ages 3 and 4, the subjects (African-American children living in poverty and assessed to be at high risk of school failure) were randomly divided into a program group that entered a high-quality preschool program based on HighScope's participatory learning approach, and a comparison group who received no preschool program. Published in *Lifetime Effects*, the study's most recent phase, *The HighScope Perry Preschool Study through Age 40* (2005), interviewed 97% of the study participants still living at the age of 40. Additional data was gathered from the subjects' school, social services, and arrest records.

The results of the The Perry Preschool project found that adults at age 40 who underwent the preschool program had higher earnings, committed fewer crimes; were more likely to hold a job, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have a preschool education (Highscope Educational Research Foundation, 2018).

**Figure 3: High Scope/Perry Preschool Study at 40**



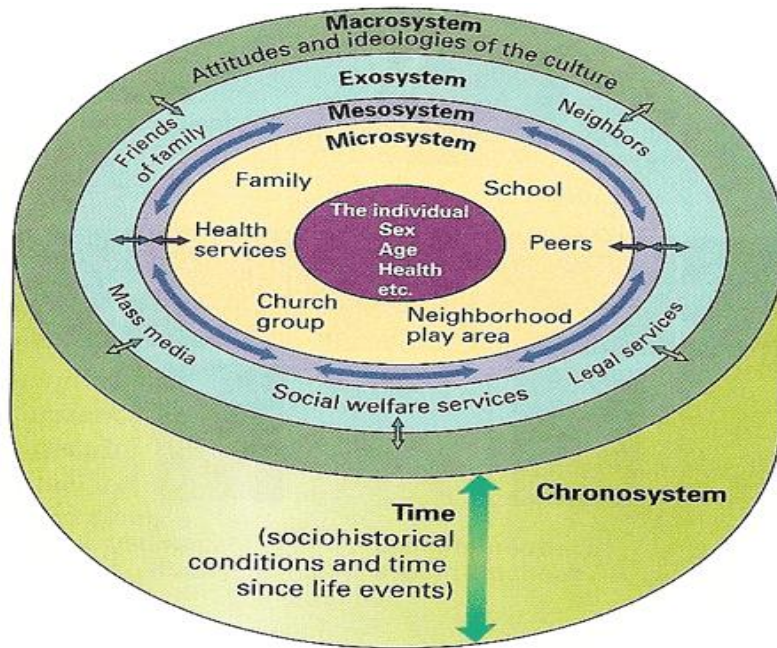
HighScope Educational Research Foundation (2018).

## 2.8 Perceptions of Child Development

Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) explain that it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that childhood was considered a unique and important stage in human life and it was then that child care, protection, education and health were given attention in legal and policy domains. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Gesell first outlines his biological process of child development when he documented the various stages of development as linear, pre-determined and progressive (Gesell, 1971). This biological underpinning is still used today to assess the extent to which children are following the expected development trajectories. However, this process according to Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) was understood as being biologically determined and any deviation from what was considered normal development was a deficiency in the individual child's biological make-up. While Gesell believed that child development was purely biological, advocates of the behaviourist approach put child development in the context of the nurturing environment thus influencing the nature-nurture debate/debacle (ibid).

It was not until the work of Piaget in the 1950's and 1960's came to the forefront that the inter-related nature of biological and environmental factors in child development was discussed. Piaget's theory of cognitive development put forward the idea that children did indeed develop in stages but that these stages were influenced by the child's interaction with the world around them (Packer, 2017). This, Lemelin *et al* (2007) agree is a complex interplay between genetic make-up and environmental factors which combine to influence the first five years of a child's life. Notably much research suggests that Children's development is strongly influenced by environmental factors (Packer, 2017; Ceka and Murrati, 2016; Raikes, 2016; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012; Lemelin, 2007). Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological theory explores the impact of context on child development and outlines the complex interconnectedness between the child's intimate environments, social relations and the broader social, economic and cultural setting (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

**Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Theory**



Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the Ecological Systems Theory (figure 2 above) on children's development based on the system of relationships that form the environment around them. Later in 1994, Bronfenbrenner renamed his theory The Bio-Ecological System Theory to emphasise that the biology of a child is a primary stimulation to his/her own development (Settersten, 1999). Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) indicates that children have links to the social society, which they are a part of and they also have links to the variety of different interconnected ecological systems that may affect the child's development directly or indirectly. O'Connor (2013) agrees, saying that it is important to create and build on links between the home and the educational setting, as well as between the various settings a child might experience and participate in, horizontally on a daily basis or vertically across the years of early childhood.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Bio-ecological System Theory highlights children are significantly impacted by their immediate environment (Microsystem). Brooker (2008) explains that each setting a child experiences, for example the home, childminder's house, granny's house the nursery or school is described as a microsystem and each plays a role on the child's development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues the most important set of links between these Microsystems is the mesosystems which explains that the more links there are the stronger the

links will be and as a result the better the child's experience and outcomes are likely to be (Brooker, 2008). Trodd (2013) explains that children's transitions need to be supported by their microsystem which is interconnected in a social mesosystem consisting of family, practitioners, primary school teachers, peers, community, placing significant importance on the parents. Notably, Aistear's (2009) theme of wellbeing advocates the importance of having strong links between the bio-ecological systems to provide the child with positive experiences through transitions. Indeed, Trodd (2013) argues a child's transitions need to be supported by their microsystem which is interconnected in a social mesosystem consisting of family, practitioners, primary school teachers, peers, community and which places a significant importance on the child's parents (Trodd, 2013; Dunlop and Fabian, 2007). These strong links and partnership with parents and families are according to the NCCA (2009) of paramount importance for learning and development as it allows children to explore and to challenge themselves and these interactions with their environment contribute significantly to their sense of well-being, in that children need to feel valued, respected, empowered and included, and as a result, 'they become positive about themselves and their learning when adults value them for who they are and when they promote warm and supportive relationships with them' (NCCA, 2009:16). Interestingly, the first Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACE Study 1995-1997) was carried out by Felitti and Anda at the Kaiser Permanente Organisation and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA. This ACE study (1995-1997) study revealed the correlation between experiences in childhood and mental and physical health indicators which last into adulthood. This research clearly shows that childhood experiences of trauma and toxic stress in the home specifically, or the community, whilst growing up raised a wide range of long-term health issues. (Nicholson et al., 2019; Butler, 2020). Essentially, research suggests that there is an increased risk of negative outcomes in adults who have experienced childhood trauma including alcoholism, suicide attempts, obesity, illicit drug use, depression etc. It is known that ACES can reduce life expectancy while preliminary evidence suggests that these negative experiences can be transmitted through generations. (Monk *et al.*, 2016).

Notably, according to the Oberstown Detention Campus Annual Report (2019), more than half of the children were not engaged in any education prior to admission, and almost a quarter had a diagnosed learning disability. The report further identifies that almost a third of the youths in Oberstown centre had lost one or both of their parents, a majority had substance misuse problems, and more than 40 per cent had mental health issues.

Interestingly and what is of relevance to this study is that the report also informs that that 19 per cent of the children sent to Oberstown by the courts in 2019 were members of the Traveller community. The Pre/School-to-Prison Pipeline describes the trend where children are pushed out of schools and into the juvenile or criminal justice system Vinson and Waldman (2020). In the USA, it has been suggested that Zero-Tolerance school policies implemented in the 1990s were the catalyst for this pipeline because they criminalized childhood behavior. Fundamentally, systematic racism and classism appears to lie at the heart of this trend that disproportionately affects Black and Latino boys (ibid). In Ireland, Travellers make up 0.6 per cent of the population yet account for 10 per cent of the male prisoner population and 22 per cent of the female prison population (Hollan, 2017). For children who are impacted by trauma, Trauma informed and culturally sensitive early childhood programmes are essential (Nicholson *et al.*, 2019).

In 1989, Bronfenbrenner expanded the bio-ecological system to include the chronosystem which involves the temporal change in the child's environment or setting which generates new experiences and conditions that affect the child's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Change occurs on a regular basis within a child's life and one of these major changes is the transition to formal schooling (Margetts and Kienig, 2013). As the child is greatly influenced by the micro system the greater the educational attainment of that environment will positively affect the transitions from preschool to primary, primary to secondary, secondary to 3<sup>rd</sup> level, and this the DES (2014) in their Traveller Education Strategy Submission for Youthreach argues, the prevalence of educational disadvantage among Travellers mirrors the situation of Travellers in Irish society and reflects high levels of discrimination and inequality. While young Travellers are at risk from the same factors as the settled community, their situation is compounded by other factors such as their immediate environment which includes, nomadism, prejudice, and the lack of inter-cultural education (ibid). A large majority of adult Travellers have never attended a post-primary school and many parents find it difficult to support their children in school, for example, with homework (DES, 2014).

Bowlby (1969) hypothesised that the development of a secure relationship is primarily dependant on the efficient interaction between the parent's care-giving behaviours and abilities and the child's attachment behaviour. He believed that if parents (especially the mother) were not available to tend to the physical and emotional needs of the child, then the child would become anxious or distressed (Bowlby, 1969). The work of Ainsworth *et al.*, (1979) in the 'The Strange Situation' confirmed Bowlby's research stating that lack of parents input, especially

the mothers, would inhibit the child's attachment systems and the child would tend to develop an avoidant, ambivalent or disorganised attachment style (Ainsworth *et al*, 1979). Winnecott (1964) also believed that the development of a child was solely related to the mother's ability to nurture and influence the child. Bronfenbrenner believed that this research, although relevant, did not consider the environment the child was brought up in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Christensen (2016) suggests that Bronfenbrenner focuses on the individual's drive and ability to influence relative to their specific environment and not so strongly on the individual's sphere of influence. In order to understand the individual, it is not enough just to describe them in the context of their family (the micro context) we must also take into account how the various systems interact with the individual and with each other (the meso context) and the macro system is then crucial for placing this analysis within the context of daily living (ibid). Engler (2007) maintains that resilience is not a dimension that is included in the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model and this, Engler (2007) argues should be integrated into the model as it gives a better understanding of an individual's capacity for overcoming negative influences and situations as Christensen (2016) acknowledges, both the individual and the environment change over time and this Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintains is crucial to our understanding of how the different systems more or less explicitly influence the individual and his or her development (ibid). These may include how we react in social conditions, problem-solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose (Bernard, 1995). As a result, Bernard (1995) contends the model is lacking as it does not consider how a child brought up in a negative environment, could overcome it. According to Engler (2007) this is the concept that certain people have an innate capacity to overcome any obstacle, shown through positive-thinking, goal-orientation, educational aspirations, motivation, persistence, and optimism. In agreement Allport (1954) concurs that prejudice reduction through contact requires an active goal-oriented effort (Pettigrew 1998).

### **2.8.1 Partnership with Parents**

Bronfenbrenner (1989) puts parents at the hearth of the child's microsystem making it one of the most important influences on a child's development. He also places the teacher in this same microsystem. Therefore, it is crucial that there is a connection between the practitioner and the parent in the education of children. Wheeler and Connors (2009) argue that a partnership between parents and early educators is widely agreed to ensure best outcomes for children. In agreement Fitzpatrick (2012) states that this partnership is based on factors such as; the parental

role of the parent as a key player in the early childhood education and care of their children and that the best outcomes for children are achieved when parents and educators work together. Fitzpatrick (2012) further posits that while the educators may be the expert on the child's learning development the parents in turn are the experts on their own child in general and how the learning environment the parents provide begins before birth and has a lasting effect on emotional, social and educational development.

Traveller parents, in most cases, have negative experiences of school themselves. Murray (2012) and Myres, McGhee and Bhopal, (2010) argue that this can fuel fear around their own children's safety in education and care settings. Murray and Urban (2012) also posit that it is the role of the Early Childhood Education and Care setting to build relationships and as a result the ECCE setting needs to be a welcoming place for both the children and the parents with the potential for community building between Traveller and non-Traveller families.



## 2.9 Conclusion

This chapter presents a discussion on the significant existing literature associated with this study. The literature identified has shown that educational outcomes for Traveller children in general are not comparable to those from the settled community (Pavee Point 2013). Fundamentally, this review has also highlighted that early childhood care and education impacts positively on children, their families, and the economy as a whole (Murray, 2012). However, despite targeted intervention in the past, the participation of children from the Travelling community in mainstream early education is not comparable to children from the settled community due to a number of different reasons and while Ireland has lots of policy supporting inclusive practice it is not implemented in many cases and so Traveller children remain marginalised and do not take up the ECCE space they are entitled to.

These negative early childhood experiences result in very negative outcomes for all involved including the over-representation of Travellers in the justice system. Almost 10 per cent of the people under probation supervision are Travellers (Holland, 2017) which is significant and warrants further research, discussion, and debate. Essentially as an ethnic minority group, Traveller children are at risk of adverse childhood experiences which have been shown to have life long negative consequences and outcomes. As a result of this review, gaps in the literature have emerged and research questions are posed which ask:

1. Where are Traveller Children accessing ECCE scheme?
2. What are the challenges faced by Traveller Children and their families in accessing ECCE provision?
3. What challenges exist for the successful integration of Traveller Children to mainstream ECCE settings?

## **Methodology – Chapter 3**

### 3.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the challenges that impact upon the Traveller child in accessing Irish Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme (DCYA, 2019) and the benefits of participating. The exploration of what could be deemed to be ‘limited’ research has also been instrumental as it has demonstrated the gaps that exist regarding this topic of research.

This chapter provides a justification for the chosen research methods and identifies the most suitable research paradigm for this study. Furthermore, this chapter critiques the chosen data analysis approach and identifies the ethical considerations pertinent to this study. However the researcher does accept that this is just a starting point as there are many participants that could be involved such as teachers in primary schools teaching junior and senior infants, teachers in early start, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers, personnel in the Early Years Education Policy Unit (EYEPU), DES, DES, Tusla and Pobal inspectors, Traveller Representative Groups etc. and of course, the voices of the children themselves.

Johnson and Christensen (2008) describe research questions as a process, issue, or phenomenon to be explored. Creswell (2008) further expands on this, suggesting research questions must meet and achieve the goals of the research and the objectives of solving the research problem. Notably, however, Hatch (2002:41) explains that ‘identifying research questions is a critical step in research design because questions give direction to the study, limit the scope of the investigation, and provide a device for evaluating progress and satisfactory completion’. It is necessary when undertaking research that there is a clear definition of the research problem and the research objectives. The objective of this study is to gain an understanding of the challenges that Traveller children and their families experience in gaining access to the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) (DCYA, 2019) in Ireland, namely

1. Where are Traveller Children accessing the ECCE scheme?
2. What are the challenges faced by Traveller Children and their families in accessing ECCE provision?
3. What challenges do practitioners identify for the successful integration of Traveller Children to mainstream ECCE settings?

## **3.2 Research Paradigms**

‘To ensure a strong research design, researchers must choose a research paradigm that is Congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality’ (Mills, et al., 2006:2). McKenzie and Knipe (2006) propose that paradigms can sometimes be referred to as the theoretical framework which influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. A chosen paradigm sets down intent, motivation, and expectations of a research study. These authors believe that without nominating a paradigm, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature, or research design. Anderson (2013) outlines several paradigms such as: positivist, constructivist, transformative, critical, pragmatism and deconstructivism. The chosen paradigm for this research study is the constructivist paradigm as it recognises the importance of the participants and the researcher’s views, beliefs, and experiences in the outcome of the research. This research aims to establish the views of the Traveller Parent and the ECCE practitioner, on the challenges surrounding access to the Early Years preschool education for children from the Travelling Community. The knowledge and views of the participants are essential to the outcome and evaluation of this study. Hence why the constructivist paradigm is the preferred paradigm for this study as it acknowledges and values participant’s views (Mertens, 2005).

### **3.2.1 Constructivist Paradigm**

Ültanir (2012) interprets that constructivism is a learning or meaning-making theory that provides an insight of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn. Ültanir (2012) further outlines that the real understanding is only constructed based on previous experience and background knowledge, maintaining that individuals construct their own knowledge through interaction of what they already believe and the ideas, advents and activities in which they encounter. Moreover, Barillaro (2009) discusses that constructivists believe that knowledge is built, or constructed through experiences as opposed to discovered. Mertens (2005) explains that the constructivist paradigm is guided by the basic assumption that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. This paradigm was selected as the views on the challenges faced

by both parents and practitioners are essential to this research study. The research seeks to identify and analyse their opinions on how these challenges might be overcome.

### **3.2.2 Ontology**

O'Hara (2011) explains that ontology is the study of 'being'. It relates to the question 'what is the nature of existence and reality'? It is strongly linked with epistemology (the study of knowledge). O'Hara (2011) further offers an overview of ontology. He refers to the nature of what things are and their being in the world as what it consists of what entities operate within it and how they relate to each other. In addition, Denzin (2005) expands that constructivists maintain that meaning comes from individuals and groups. They believe the concept that reality is socially discussed and open to individual interpretation. This research aims to explore the social structures of knowledge and understanding related to the research topic. Findings from discussions with participants are essential to this study as the participant's views of the world are critical to the research findings. Through this the researcher hopes to highlight the challenges that exist for the Traveller child and their family when accessing Early Years education and the importance of training in equality and inclusion for Early Years Practitioners. Therefore, the ontology of this paradigm puts forward that the participants view of reality may change over the duration of the study.

### **3.2.3 Epistemology**

In epistemology, a central focus of study comes from interactions between the researcher and the participants. Fox (1999) posits that the word epistemology is from the Greek language and states that it refers to the study of knowledge and translates as logical discourse. Furthermore, Crotty (2003) further asserts that epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge, its possibilities, scope, and general basis. In other words, what can we know and how can we know what we know? Landauer & Rowlands (2010) discuss epistemology as the study of methods used to acquire knowledge. It answers the question - how do we know? It encompasses the nature of concepts, the constructing of concepts, the validity of the sense, logical reasoning, as well as thoughts, ideas, memories, emotions, and all things mental. It concerns how our minds relate to reality and whether these relationships are valid or not. Martin (2010) indicates that without knowledge we cannot analyse the world around us. It is, therefore, the study of

knowledge and where knowledge comes from. The epistemology in this paradigm suggests that knowledge is subjective, and that knowledge cannot be present without persons to construct it and as a result the relationship between participants in the study is extremely important.

### **3.3 Data Collection Methods**

This study undertakes qualitative research in the form of in-depth semi structured interviews. An interview is a one-to-one conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006:128) describe interviewing as ‘a special kind of knowledge-producing conversation’. An interpretative qualitative research method is significant for this research to help get an in-depth understanding of the challenges Traveller Children and their families are encountering in assessing ECCE (DCYA, 2019) in Ireland. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) assert interviews are especially useful for understanding the research participants' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. The interview method used in this study was the semi-structured or standardised open-ended interview. According to May (2001) open-ended questions give respondents more freedom to answer questions in a way that suits their interpretations and may offer information in areas, which have not been predicted by the researcher. The interviewer had pre-set questions, but the responses were not categorised as they would be in a structured interview. The data collected was qualitative allowing research participants to describe their perceptions of the challenges faced in gaining access to ECCE (DCYA, 2019). The variables measured included

- background family information,
- education variables for parents and practitioners,
- parents' participation in their child's education,
- parents' perception of the benefits of ECCE
- importance of their children accessing ECCE
- parents' aspirations for their children.
- Practitioner Bias
- ECCE Policy

Evans and Fuller (1999) discuss the concept of creating an informal and nonthreatening environment when interviewing parents to enable parents to express themselves freely. In acknowledgement of this each parent interview took place in a venue chosen by the parent.

### **3.3.1 Semi Structured Interviews**

Edwards and Holland (2013) discuss that in a typical semi-structured interview the researcher has a list of questions or series of topics they want to cover in the interview. However, there is flexibility in how and when the questions are put and how the interviewee can respond. This allows the researcher to pursue a line of discussion which has been opened by the interviewee's answers. Furthermore, Galleta (2013) depicts that semi structured interviews are valued for accommodation to a range of research goals, typically reflecting variation in its use of questions, prompts, and accompanying tools and resources to draw the participant more fully into the topic under study. Galleta (2013) further proposes that each interview question should be clearly connected to the research topic and that each question should progress toward a fully in-depth exploration of the study. For this study, the participants were purposive samples. Also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units (e.g., people, cases/organisations, events, pieces of data) that are to be studied. The researcher did not know the parents personally, however, they were selected for a reason that related to the research to get an expert insight into the topic. The preschool practitioners were chosen randomly from the Tusla register of ECCE services. This study has taken an exploratory approach and acquired perspectives from both Parents from the Travelling Community and Pre-school practitioners to ascertain any gaps in the existing provision of the scheme.

The CIT code of ethics was followed, and a letter of consent was signed by the participants (see appendicis). With reference to GDPR considerations the data secured through these interviews will be stored in a secure place and destroyed when the study is complete.

Table 3.1 Participants

Interviewees	Number of Participants	Information on Participants
Parents from the Travelling Community	10	Parents who have children ages 3-6 who are entitled to avail of the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2010/2019)
Pre-school Practitioners	10	Pre-school practitioners working in a service which is offering the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019)

The researcher selected quotes that are coherent, rational and are the most representative of the research findings on the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) and the challenges that face the Traveller Child in his/her access to the same.

### 3.4 Primary Data

In keeping with Guffey's (2009) observation that primary data is first-hand experience and observation completed by an individual, this researcher conducted in-depth semi structured interviews about the ECCE scheme with Traveller parents and preschool practitioners. These interviews were conducted to give an insight to the challenges that Children from the Travelling Community encounter when accessing ECCE (DCYA, 2019). Kothari (2009:95) further acknowledges that primary data is collected afresh and for the first time, and thus happens to be original in character'. It can be said that the more primary data is collected the more it indicates the consistency and reliability of raw information in the research area and this Kotler and Armstrong (2009) argue that primary data should be relevant, accurate, current and unbiased. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) describe interviews as especially useful for understanding participants' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. The interview method used in this study was the semi-structured or standardised open-ended interview. According to Ponto (2015) open-ended questions give respondents more freedom to answer questions in a way that suits their interpretations and may offer information in areas, which have not been predicted by the researcher.



### **3.4.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary research was carried out for the purpose of this study using academic books, journals, newspaper articles and Google scholar on the internet. This secondary data was identified and reviewed prior to the commencement of the primary research. Guffey (2009:259) clarifies that secondary data comes from ‘reading what others have experienced and observed.’ Kumar (2011b:58) noted that secondary data can indicate any deficiencies and gaps within a research topic’. As a result, the researcher can make primary data more specific and relevant to the study. Secondary data can highlight and alert the researcher to any problems or difficulties within the research area. Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) databases, for examples ERIC – Educational Resources Information Centre, Ebsco-Host and Science Direct were assessed on a regular basis to find relevant articles for this study. The secondary data obtained from these sources has formed the knowledge base for this study.

Additional secondary research materials were sourced from Irish and international organisations such as, UNICEF, UNESCO WHO, Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point, Early Childhood Ireland and reports by the Irish Government for example, Ready to learn – A White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1992), All Ireland Health Traveller Health Study (2010), Commission on Itinerancy (1963), Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (2016), Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, Siolta (CECD, 2006) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009), National Evaluation Report on Preschools for Travellers, First 5, Preschool Regulation and inspection processes. A range of Irish newspapers were researched including the Irish Times and The Irish Examiner. A variety of books on ECCE, minorities, diversity and equality and furthermore secondary material was sourced from a range of academic journals. Also included were material published by Traveller themselves for example *Maggie May’s Day*, this is a day in the life of a four-year-old Traveller girl living in a trailer in her grandparent’s yard in Fermoy. It incorporates the Traveller Cant language as Maggie May’s life moves between the Traveller community and the settled community. It is her story, in her own words.

### **3.4.3 Participants**

The participants in this research were chosen from the early years’ sector in the county of Cork. The practitioners were part of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) government

funded scheme (2010) and covered the spectrum of private, community and full day care providers (see table 2.1). practitioners were recruited randomly selected from registered centres and were invited to engage in a one-to-one interview with the researcher on the topics relating to the study.

Access to Traveller parents was achieved by linking in with local training networks for Travellers in the Munster region. This was achieved largely from the researcher's role as Community Health development Worker with the Travellers of North Cork (TNC) as well as her advocacy/voluntary involvement with the various Traveller Organisations in the Munster Region. The participants were randomly selected and were not known to the researcher. TNC is a Traveller lead programme funded by the HSE and concentrates on improving the health and welfare of the Travelling Community from a health promotional perspective. These links acted as gatekeepers for the researcher to gain access to Traveller parents. Interviews with Traveller Parents (9 mothers and 1 father), in different geographical areas, were organised through the involvement of the stakeholders mentioned above.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Bryman (2012) depicts that following a code of ethics or indeed, a set of moral principles allows the researcher to adopt integrity and credibility into their research study. Mertens (2009:12) identifies three ethical principles that were used as a guideline in this research. these are beneficence, which helps to maximise good outcomes and minimise risk or harm. Respect, all participants are treated with respect and justice, as in, those who are responsible for carrying out the research should be the ones who bare the risks.

Prior to embarking on the study, ethical approval was sought, obtained, and subsequently compiled with Cork Institute of technology's code of research ethics. For this research study ethical issues associated with all participants needed to be addressed and implemented throughout. This included voluntary participation, signed consent forms, anonymity and confidentiality, bias, and limitation. Ethical issues can arise especially when including an ethnic minority group such as the Travelling Community.

### **3.5.1 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent (see appendices)**

Freeman & Mathison (2009:70) define voluntary participation as ‘the ability to act or make a judgement based on one’s own free choice’. This implies that participation is provided freely without pressures such as coercion, threats, or persuasion. Bell (2005) provides sample codes of practise which require researchers to ensure participants are fully aware of the purpose of the research and understand their rights. Participants should be informed that participation is voluntary and that participants are free to refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw at any time. The participant needs to be aware of everything they consent to. Consent can be spoken or written; if it is written the participant may obtain a copy. Informed consent should be carried out before conducting interviews.

### **3.5.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The terms ‘confidentiality’ and ‘anonymity’ are appropriately defined by Mertens (2009:342) as the following: Confidentiality means that the privacy of individuals will be protected in that the data they provide will be handled and reported in such a way that they cannot be associated with them personally; Anonymity means that no uniquely identifying information is attached to the data, and thus no one, not even the researcher, can trace the data back to the individual providing them. For this research each participant was assigned a number. The information obtained for the purpose of this study will be solely used for this present study; and the audio recording, transcripts and other information will be destroyed following the correction of this thesis as per MTU and GDPR regulations.

### **3.5.3 Rapport**

Guillemin and Heggen (2009:292) outline that it is the researcher’s ethical responsibility to maintain a “fine balance between building sufficient trust to be able to probe participants for potential rich data, while at the same time maintaining enough distance in respect of the participant”. Throughout the duration of this research study, all participants were given the upmost respect from the researcher. Full attention was given to them during the interviews and it was expressed that their willingness to take part in the study was greatly appreciated. The researcher valued all opinions and views expressed as these were purposeful for the research topic.

### **3.5.4 Bias**

Bias is another ethical issue which this researcher needed to address. Bloor and Wood (2006) highlight that bias can derive from either a conscious or unconscious tendency on behalf of the researcher to collect or/and interpret data in such a way as to produce an erroneous conclusion or conclusions that favour their own beliefs or commitments. Throughout this research the researcher was mindful that questions should not be leading or biased in such a way that would influence the respondent's answer. This may have become an issue as this researcher had, prior to this research worked closely with various Traveller Groups for many years although had not worked directly with the interviewees in this study. McDowell (2013) stresses that facial expressions and body language during interviews can or may influence or impact on the quality of primary data collected.

### **3.6 Thematic Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes or patterns within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in detail and frequently it goes further and interprets various aspects of the research topic (ibid). The researcher read through the interview transcripts and highlighted relevant material or information and addressed the research questions. In addition, themes were identified which stressed any recurring emerging themes from the transcripts and brief comments were attached. In practice, according to Attride-Sterling (2001) the stages of thematic analysis are similar to the basic process of a grounded theory analysis. Material is coded, codes are examined to look for common themes and themes are examined to determine whether they can be organised into superordinate and subordinate themes.

The data was thoroughly examined for any similarities and differences among the relevant stakeholders, ie, the providers of the ECCE and the Parents involved. In every interview transcript, an overarching theme was identified. Thematic analyses were adopted to highlight key responses that emphasises significant findings to help in more systematic discussions. The themes were developed through recurring topics that emerged from the in-depth semi-structured interviews which were used to present and analyse primary data under five key

themes with additional sub-headings to provide in-depth and rich qualitative data. The five themes are as follows:

	Themes
1.	Stakeholders initial response to the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2010, 2019)
2.	Challenges encountered by both preschool practitioners and parents in relation to Traveller children accessing ECCE
3.	Parent and practitioner relationships
4.	Traveller culture – inclusion and equality
5.	Policies and practices

### **3.6.1 Sampling and Pilot Study**

A purposive sampling method was developed when selecting participants. Babbie (2014) and Creswell (2007) agree that purposive sampling is a method used in qualitative research to select research participants for studies. As a result, participants were chosen based on certain criteria; individuals over 18 who are working directly with children in ECCE settings providing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) and Parents of children from the Travelling Community.

McNabb (2013) argues that exploratory studies are often described as a pilot study as part of a multipart research. The informants who took part in the pilot study were one ECCE practitioner and one parent from the Travelling Community. Both were women. Pilot test interviews are practical and constructive to envisage if interviewees understand the questions asked and the phrases used. This provides the interviewer with an overall opinion on the interview questions. Siraj-Blatchford (2010) recommend a pilot study as they posit, it encourages a greater informity of approach and therefore a greater interview reliability.

### **3.7 Research Validity and Transparency**

In qualitative research Mac Naughton *et al.*, (2010) stress that validity is the process of establishing the truth of the research outcomes and each paradigm has its own validity process. Qualitative data measures reliability, validity, and transparency to sustain the constancy and trustworthiness of the results. The constructivist's knowledge is obtained by being local and specific to a particular research project conducted in circumstances with participants (Hughes, 2010). Validity relates to the extent of the research and provides an applicable and valid account of the stakeholders' opinions and terminology and Edwards (2001) agrees that validity in qualitative research is a matter of being able to offer as sound a representation of the field of study as the research methods allow. However, Blaxter *et al.*, (1996) argue that validity has to do with whether your techniques relate to or measure the issues that you are exploring. In this research the researcher controlled all possible factors that threatened the research's validity for example ethical considerations which was a primary concern and responsibility.

In qualitative research, transparency refers to the clarity of providing specific information that has an impact in the process at hand. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) agree that transparency is required in most interpretations of findings and results to provide a clear description of terminology and explanations of why a given interpretation is made. Holloway (2005) further argues that transparency is an attempt to demonstrate the creditability of qualitative research by allowing the reader to see through the researchers' decision making and their analytical approach to the data. Transparency is key to both ethical consideration and epistemology and which Holloway (2005) describes as an audit trail. The researcher took consideration to ensure that transparency was revealed and that ethical issues were not overlooked thus safeguarding that consideration was given to any problems that arose out of the qualitative method of in-depth interviews.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This research ultimately hopes to paint a holistic picture of ECCE (DCYA, 2019) for Traveller Children through the lens of equality and diversity. This can be used as a barometer for change, to influence policy or as an example of good practice. This research is needed because eight years have elapsed since the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme was introduced and in the interests of the pre-school Traveller child, the practices that have evolved, due to the new policy changes, need to be evaluated. This research makes a start in this area,

but much more is needed to ensure Traveller children gain access to, and benefit from, the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019).

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion**

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter intertwines the findings from the literature with that of the field research. The 20 in depth interviews revealed some particularly important findings and mirrored much of the literature findings. The results from the primary data are analysed and discussed in this chapter using direct quotes under the five themes (listed below) which emerged from the data. A total of 20 in- depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including ten interviews with Traveller parents of children attending ECCE and ten interviews with ECEC practitioners delivering the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019)

The data was collected to answer the following research questions.

1. How do pre-school Traveller Children and their parents' access and experience ECCE?
2. What are the challenges faced by Traveller children and their families in accessing ECCE provision?
3. What challenges exist for practitioners for the successful inclusion of children from the Travelling Community?

The following key themes emerged from the research:

1. Stake holders' initial response to the ECCE scheme (2019) - Does a one size fit all?
2. Challenges encountered by both preschool practitioners and Parents in relation to ensuring Traveller children access the ECCE scheme (2019)
3. Parent and practitioner relationships
4. Traveller culture – inclusion and equality and anti bias
5. ECCE Policies and practices



## Study Participants

**Table 4.1 Practitioner details**

Practitioner	Type of Setting	Qualification	Years of Experience	Traveller Children included now or in the past
PP1	Community	Level 8	10	Yes
PP2	Community	Level 7	8	Yes
PP3	Community	Level 8	6	Yes
PP4	Community	Level 7	10	Yes
PP5	Private	Level 7	14	Yes
PP6	Community	Level 8	20	Yes
PP7	Private (Montessori)	Level 8	15	No
PP8	Private	Level 6	18	Yes
PP9	Private (Montessori)	Level 7	15	No
PP10	Community	Level 6	8	Yes

It is interesting to note that Traveller children were mainly in community settings with little visibility in private settings.

**Table 4.2 Parent details**

Parent	Gender	Settled/unsettled	Number of children	Number of children attending ECCE since its introduction	Type of setting child attends
TP1	Female	Homeless - Emergency accommodation	4	1	Community
TP2	Female	Homeless – in caravan under threat of eviction	5	2	Community
TP3	Female	Settled	7	2	Community
TP4	Female	Settled – halting site	8	2	Community
TP5	Female	Settled	2	2	Community
TP6	Female	Settled – halting site	3	2	Community
TP7	Female	Settled	2	1	Community
TP8	Female	Homeless - Emergency accommodation	4	2	Community
TP9	Female	Settled	3	1	Community
TP10	Male	Settled	4	2	Community

## 4.2 Parents and Practitioners initial response to the ECCE scheme – Does a one size fit all?

### 4.2.1 Parental Initial Responses to the ECCE Scheme

The DCYA (2019) describes the ECCE scheme as providing a flexible, future-focused and sustainable platform to invest in quality early learning and care, stating that it is their commitment to children and an investment in families. This is reflected in the initial responses of the stakeholders including both practitioners and parents. One parent clearly asserted that,

*“I want them [their children] to have the education I never had”* (TP1).

This parent further expanded that she never had the opportunity to attend formal education on a regular basis due to the travelling nature of her family. Another parent concurred advocating that:

*“It is my wish that my children get schooled, I never did and I can’t read or write.... I hated school and the teachers hated me so I didn’t do the learning.... I didn’t want to be there and they [the teachers] didn’t want me there and no one missed me when I was gone, no one was out checking if you missed days at school. The nuns would sometimes give you food in my time, but they were bitches. I think things might be better now for the young ones. The babies going off to preschool should be having fun but it’s hard to get in to the school. You know some don’t want my kids when they hear we are travellers”* [TP4]

Nugent (2010) acknowledges that it is not disputed that Traveller children reportedly suffer from the lowest rates of educational attainment of any group, and the provision of a quality pre-school service is one of the early preventable measures that policy makers can put in place. Young Traveller Children suffer the negative outcomes attached to being a Traveller as well as being a minority within the Travelling community that is, being a child, a minor who has no power and often no voice (Pavee Point, 2013). As a result of this through no fault of their own they are often prevented from attending ECCE services and the inflexibility of pobal’s inspections on the ECCE scheme which focus on attendance and punctuality is not inkeeping with the culture of the Travellers families.

*“I want my child to have the chances I never had but sometimes I just can’t get there on time, as I have to get the older ones to school first”* (TP4).

Interestingly, Traveller parents [n=10] in the study could see the benefits of their children attending ECCE services including that ‘it helps the child to get on with other kids’ [TP3] and

*“they need to learn to behave like everyone else”* (TP1).

In addition, another parent [TP8] asserted that a benefit of attending ECCE was that it

*“gave ya a break in the morning to get the place cleaned and tidy”*

while parent [TP10] further explained that

*“it was free minding of the kids and they get to do colouring and stuff they like... it keeps ‘em busy like’, the kids need to be busy like, they drive you mad sometimes under your feet looking for stuff or outside fighting with the cousins”.*

Notably, all ten Traveller parents dismissed the idea of reverting back to the old system of ‘preschools for Travellers’ the reasons for this included the importance of wanting

‘to fit in’ [TP9] and to be ‘*like the rest of the kids*’ [TP6].

Another parent clearly asserted that she did not want segregated preschools for travellers stating the move away from Traveller only preschools was the right move

*“No, no, no we are moving on, why should we have to hide away?”* (TP3).

Interestingly, another parent [TP6] explained that her older children attended a preschool for travellers, she noted that

*“it was good, but we were like we were kept away from everyone else because we wouldn’t be good enough to be around the normal kids”.*

The term ‘*normal kids*’ is an interesting term to use as it suggests that the parents did not see themselves as being the same or indeed ‘equal’ to children who were not from the travelling community. When this parent was probed further, she asserted that the

*“normal kids would have homes and would know how to use the toilet, we lived at the side of a road for a good while...we had no running water and no toilet, my young one when she started pre-school [in 2016 in a community setting] didn’t know how to use the toilet...she was able to go but not use the toilet itself. She was afraid of it...the flush...she didn’t know about it and thought she was going to flush away. The normal kids had no problem like that because they had that at home. Nora [name changed] would come home from preschool crying to go to*

the toilet coz she was too afraid to use it. The teachers didn't know. They thought we were all normal like the rest of the kids. I said it to the teacher, and she said Nora would learn it but I wanted her to help Nora and go with her to the toilet. She said she couldn't help 'em all and couldn't leave the rest of the kids every time Nora need to go..."

[TP6]

The only negative identified by the parents in relation to their initial responses to the scheme was the fact that many struggled to find a provider. Essentially, they asserted that they struggled to enrol their children into services as they are on a 'waiting list' for many preschools [TP3, TP5, TP8]. They also asserted that practitioners were trying to accommodate them but were also anxious that children should not miss days as they said, '*the preschool said they won't get paid if we miss days, so we have to go every day*'. This suited some participants as they were now '*settled travellers*' while one parent who at present is not settled feels '*they don't care about our culture, we might not be here, or we move off... we have to fill in all the forms again then and it takes ages*'. If sites had proper facilities like toilets, water etc this problem wouldn't happen.

Overall, it appears that the initial responses of the parents to ECCE were favourable. All saw benefits of it including benefits to the children's development including *learning to play* [TP1], *learning to share* [TP2] and *learn to use the things we might not have at home like the toilet* [TP6]. In addition, others saw that it gave them as parents free time to do their own chores including shopping, cleaning, and tidying [TP 3, TP8, TP9]. Essentially, the ECCE scheme (preschool provision) was welcomed by all ten parents regardless of their reasons.

#### **4.2.2 Practitioner Initial Response to the ECCE scheme – Does a One Size Fit All?**

Fundamentally this research found that some Practitioner's initial response was one of concern especially in relation to services losing funding due to the high absence rate of Traveller children. Notably PP7 stated that she would not be in favour of accepting Traveller children because of this

*"it is too much work trying to comply with Pobal and funding matters, I just couldn't afford it"* (PP7).

All Practitioners interviewed agreed that the inflexibility on Pobal's funding policy is directly affecting the Travellers child's access to ECCE.

*“The current funding streams just don’t sit well with the Traveller way of life, they (Pobal) don’t take into account people’s ways of life” (PP1),*

The underpinning principle of the capital funding programmes is to increase the number of childcare places in areas of greatest need (Pobal, 2019) and this inflexibility according to all Practitioners interviewed is directly affecting the very children that are of greatest need with PP1 and PP3 stating

*“We just can’t operate in a one size fits all environment”.*

PP1 further explains how *“it is all about bums on seats”* (again highlighting the strictness of Pobal compliance) and to be compliant ECCE facilities must on the day of a (sometimes) unannounced visit, verify that the actual number of DCYA approved ECCE childcare places in the service corresponds with the number of childcare places enrolled and in attendance on the day of the visit. Absences, transfers, and service level reductions will also be reviewed. Failure to comply with the on-site compliance visit and to provide information on the day of the visit may according to Pobal (2019) result in the service being deemed non-compliant and in breach of contractual requirements under the grant funding agreement(s)

*“I lost €1000 in funding due to a Traveller child being missing for three Thursdays in a row, but I have to keep a place for that child, she needs it and this is not her fault she should not be penalised for the challenges that being part of a minority group throws at her” (PP1).*

The Traveller child’s experience of childhood can be a series of unfortunate events that impact on their ability to attend preschool every day.

*“sometimes it is just so hard to sort things out in the morning, if one child is sick or if there is only enough hot water for the older children the younger ones will not get to preschool. It is very hard when you have 8 children under 11 years” (TP9)*

As discussed in chapter two of this investigation, Pavee Point (2013) argue that poor accommodation can be a contributing factor to the high level of absence recorded by pre-school practitioners with TP1 stating

*“We are in emergency accommodation and sometimes we have to move because the hotel needs the room and we could be in a hotel a good bit away and I can’t get the kids to school” (TP1).*

This is also a problem for TP8 who affirms

*“I hate sending my child to school when we are homeless it is very embarrassing for me to admit this and when some other child ask them where they live they get upset”*

Deputy John McGuinness, during a Dail Eireann debate in April 2019 approached this issue stating *“that while Pobal has a duty to audit, we as politicians, and the Minister (Minister Katherine Zappone) in particular, have a duty to suggest to Pobal that there is a need for flexibility.”* These comments are echoed in the words of PP1 who argues that

*“Pobal needs to be more flexible, these are children that need ECCE the most, primary schools would not be interrogated over the fact that a child has missed 3 Thursdays in a row and they definitely wouldn’t lose 1000-euro funding over it”* (PP1).

PP6 explains how the ECCE ‘Higher Capitation’ rate is equivalent to an additional €11.25 per child per week above the €69.00 standard rate (2018/2019 rates) and the ratio is 1:11. To qualify for the higher capitation the room leader must have a qualification recognised as meeting the minimum requirements for ECCE ‘Higher Cap’ which is listed by the DCYA (2019) as a minimum of level 7 on the NFQ or equivalent and a minimum of three years’ paid experience working in the childcare sector. (see appendices for example).

Even with full capacity PP1, PP6, PP5, PP3 and PP7 admit that it is very hard to meet the costs of running a service to the standard imposed by Pobal on the funding available,

*“not to mind trying to facilitate children from the Travelling community”* (PP7).

PP6 further explains how the inflexibility of Pobal is in direct conflict with the policy of many service providers including her own (Community setting).

*“Basically, the schemes are for attendance, but we sell a space or a place, so our service is from 9am to 12pm, Monday to Friday. We sell this space to a child and whether they attend or not we still have that space and we must have staff to cover that space, but Pobal do not see it this way and it is causing a lot of trouble at the moment”* (PP6).

PP3, PP5, PP7 and PP9 all admitted that they have in the past turned away Traveller children telling parents that they (the setting) were full, while agreeing that this is a form of discrimination, they blame the fear of loosing funding due to Pobal’s strict funding criteria as one of the major reasons for this. PP3 and PP6 both agreed that the *“worst part is that these are the children who need it [ECCE] the most”*, but PP6 describes a recent audit by Pobal to being *“akin to an inquisition”*

*“8 hours solid, nonstop, sitting there, they didn’t even have a cup of tea it was horrendous, my God they [Pobal] would make me want to leave the sector” (PP6).*

All parents and the practitioners agreed that while it was highly beneficial and perhaps essential that Traveller Children attend ECCE.

*“Integration has led to acceptance and where this is started in the early years it goes right the way through leading to seamless transitions” (PP1).*

However, all practitioners admit that the policies in place often play a game of “tug of war” (PP6) with the children most in need of ECCE but the introduction of Mo Sceal (NCCA, 2018) in the area of transition from preschool to primary school is they agree a major step in the right direction.

*“Sometimes you see policies coming out and you wonder have these people ever seen a child, an actual child. I think that some people sit in an office some days wondering how they are going to piss the sector off now. Somebody in Tusla or Pobal that is their remit to make up the cockamammy things to annoy people!” (PP1).*

### **4.3 Challenges Encountered by Parents in Relation to Traveller Children Accessing ECCE**

*“I never went to preschool my-self, but I see the advantages of it” (TP8).*

As discussed in chapter two and according to Pavee Point (2013) poor accommodation, homelessness, poor health and the experience of widespread prejudice and discrimination combine to create a particular set of circumstances that militate against many Traveller children participating fully in education. Not one of the parents interviewed for this study had themselves attended preschool,

*“my mother had 4 under 5 at one stage and preschool was the least of her worries” (TP2)*

and as a result, the chance to integrate with children from the settled community did not happen until they went to primary school.

*“When we were 4, we were sent to the big school down the road, it would have been our first time mixing with anyone outside of the Travelling community and it was hard to settle” (TP1).*



Social inclusion is an important aspect in the success of young Traveller children's participation in pre-school. This, Nutbrown and Clough (2006) argue is the drive toward maximal participation in and minimal exclusion from ECCE. However, as Traveller parents did not experience preschool themselves their view of ECCE is based on their own experiences at what is now considered preschool age in a primary school setting and they fear this for their own children with TP1 explaining how they (herself and her siblings) were not accepted nor where they included in anything

“they wrote us off at 4 and 5 years of age”.

TP2 explains that even though she had a “*very nice principal*” she was still picked on and discriminated against and called names such as dirty, smelly and knacker.

*“It was all negative where education was involved”* (TP2).

Challenges in accessing ECCE come to Traveller children in many guises. Parental education attainment is considered a measure in the education attainments of their children. Eccles (2005) argues that there is consistent evidence that parents' education predicts children's educational outcomes, alongside other distal family characteristics such as family income, parents' occupations and residence location. Parents from higher socioeconomic status report higher educational and occupational expectations for their children than parents from lower socioeconomic status (Eccles, 2009; Schoon, 2010).

*“I have my junior cert but I was not encouraged to go any further, I would have liked to but the school did not encourage it and my parents and family only laughed at me, no one in my family went any further [in education] and my parents cannot read or write and neither can most of my brothers and sisters”* (TP4).

These comments are resonated in CSO (2012) statistics which indicate that 80% of adult Travellers (18 and over) cannot read or write. The OECD (2018) further outlines that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds including ethnic minorities were less likely to have participated in pre-primary education. The Early Childhood Stats series (2018) tells us there are 2,399 Traveller children attending Early Years Services in Ireland yet CSO (2017) figures from Census 2016 show a total of 4023 Traveller Children of preschool age in the country (not including NI). Significantly this shows that 40% of Traveller children are not availing of Early Years Services in Ireland

*“like, who wants us? I’d say half the places only take us because they have to”* (TP5).

Irwin *et al* (2007) contends that if the window of opportunity presented by the early years is missed it becomes increasingly difficult, in terms of both time and resources, to create a successful life course.

*“I know that preschool is where my children need to be but we as Travellers often have to make the most of a bad lot and we don’t have a car and I find it hard to fill out the forms and I am embarrassed to ask for help in case they laugh at me and my children will see it and not want to go in. I want a better life for my children, I want them to have choices, but I can see how this is like a history repeating itself and my children will be left trailing behind”* (TP9).

The life of the Traveller Child can be chaotic which in turn challenges their access to ECCE.

*“Nothing would put me off sending my child to preschool, but certain circumstances make it hard at times. The life we live sometimes makes it impossible to get there. The teacher tells me that she needs us to go as she is keeping her place and she might lose funding over it or something, I don’t really understand, but when you are homeless with 4 children and 3 of them going to different schools its just too hard at times”* (TP4).

TP2 further explains how their living conditions are impacting access to ECCE for her 4 and 5-year-old children.

*“We are living in this caravan here at the front of my parents in law’s house since we became homeless, it is not the best, but it is a roof over our heads. I have 2 children that should be in pre-school but one has a bowel condition that needs a wash out every day and because we do not have running water she is often sick with an infection unable to go to school and the other child is suffering from what the doctor said could be some form of depression because she is afraid if she goes we might be gone when she come home and she might not be able to find us”*(TP2).

Poor housing conditions is leading to poor health for many of the Travelling community. CSO (2017) indicate that 83% of the Traveller population are living in permanent accommodation (this includes official halting sites) but the ESRI (2017) indicate this type of accommodation is likely to be overcrowded and is more likely than standard accommodation to lack central heating, piped water and sewerage facilities.

*“The children are constantly sick with their chests, the roof is leaking, and the mould is growing up the walls, I’m paying the council rent for this and they won’t even come near us to fix anything”* (TP3).

The ESRI (2017) further concedes that these conditions are also associated with low levels of education and not being in employment

*“my husband would love to work, but sure nobody will give him a job when he gives the site address here and he suffers very badly with his nerves because of it” (TP4).*

The ITM (2017) agree that poorly maintained sites with basic facilities have a huge effect on Traveller’s health.

*“The halting site is filthy and full of rats with no lighting at night. The toilets are in the field behind us and I cannot allow my children to go over there alone and I will not take them at night so even my 8-year-old still wears nappies at night and is not fully trained by day either. This has held her back and she is embarrassed and ashamed of this. My other child started in preschool, but the teacher was mad because he wasn’t trained [toilet] and now I’m afraid to send him. We have enough problems here of our own without the children been given out to in school” (TP3).*

#### **4.3.1 Challenges Encountered by Practitioners in Relation to Traveller Children Accessing ECCE**

“It’s all about bums on seats” PP1

*“We had 2 children from the Travelling community attending at different times, they finished with us last year and we were not sorry! There attendance was so haphazard, the mother always had an excuse that they were sick, that they had asthma and she had to keep them at home, but they were home quite a lot” PP9.*

When PP9 was asked if she was aware of the living conditions that these children were living in, she answered

*“No sure that is not my concern, my concern is to keep this preschool up and running” (PP9).*

Most childcare facilities are either community or private settings and the ECCE is just one part of what in essence is business enterprise instead of a state run social good.

*“This setting is run as a business; the ECCE scheme is only one part of what we do and probably the least profitable if I’m being honest. The children here are here since they were small babies, and this is just a progression that their parents expect, and one we are obliged to provide by Pobal. We get a lot more money from full day care” (PP7).*

When asked if the setting would be happy accepting children from the Travelling community the practitioner (PP7) replied

*“No I would not because the parents that use this service are mostly professional people and they have a certain standard and would be anxious that their children are mixing in the right circles, if you know what I mean, like we are what would be considered as a feeder creche and preschool for a lot of the private primary and even the secondary schools in the City”.*

PP7 further posits that she must be mindful of her staff and would be *“afraid if they met a Traveller Parent in town”* that they might be accosted over something that happened in the school

*“I mean, like I had a Traveller Father get very annoyed at the door one day when I told him we had no places available, he wanted to know where else would he go as this place was nearest to them and they did not have a car, like this is really not my concern” (PP7).*

This discourse is alarming 22 years on from 1998 when the INTO then claimed that a culture of disrespect has been a major problem for members of the Travelling community when accessing various services including education provision. In the literature reviewed in chapter two, Cuddihy (2016) argues, the social learning that occurs during contact promotes empathy and respect for difference and leads to enhanced social inclusion but Just being admitted to the setting is not enough, social learning needs to happen. The NCCA provide the Aistear (2009) framework for curriculum which is recognised by Pobal as a criterion for funding provision for ECCE and an inclusive approach to education (DCYA, 2016). Yet the DCYA (2016) also contend that inclusion is a process, which must run through the whole curriculum, if it is to be genuine.

This raises a concern, should preschools providing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) be business enterprise?

*“we accept all diversity here we have so many nationalities, too many to mention, we have children with autism and other disabilities, and we consider, ourselves to totally accepting, (PP9).*

However, when asked if the setting would accept children from the Travelling community there was some confusion as the practitioner said that she considered the Travelling community as Irish and as a community who are

*“most likely to cause trouble in the setting, not turn up and and would be hard for the staff to deal with” (PP9).*

McVeigh (2004) agrees there is a strong resistance amongst Irish society to calling the treatment of Travellers racist as there is a tendency to see racism only in relation to skin colour

and therefore Travellers cannot experience racism because they are white and not a different race or nationality.

The results of a hidden curriculum filter out into society as children grow into adults. Bronfenbrenner (1978) places the school in the micro system of a child's life; therefore the preschool practitioner plays a vital role in ensuring that the Traveller child feels secure and accepted in their setting in line with the Aistear (2009) theme of Identity and belonging. *"Children are very quick to pick up on things, you have to be so careful in what you say or do"* (PP3).

Realistically, only two of the practitioners interviewed for this study appeared to be fully accepting of Traveller children in their setting. Interestingly, both settings were placed in areas of socio-economic deprivation and both were community settings.

*"Children are children, and you cannot blame them for 'the sins of the father' you wouldn't do that with the settled community"* (PP1).

#### **4.3.2 Policy and Practice: (Traveller Parents' Perspective)**

*"The Travelling community are fearful of policy; it has never worked in their favour"* (TP1).

Pavee Point (2010) in agreement recognises that discriminatory policies and practices have led to social exclusion and poor performance in education for members of the Travelling Community. Pobal's policy with reference to attendance is causing this trepidation to colour the Traveller parents view of ECCE.

*"...if I hear that word policy again I will scream, policies for the Travelling community only ever mean trouble, move your wagon you're not allowed due to policy, policy says you have to be settled – no more travelling for you, sorry policy says I can't serve you and everytime we challenge it we get, we've changed our policy did you not read the notice? and it goes on and on"* (TP3).

Practitioners need to be aware of this when engaging with parents from the Travelling community and explain the need for attendance in a way that does not sound derogatory

*"why didn't she just tell me that she gets paid for my child to go to the school and she will not get paid if he doesn't, it's as simple as that"* (TP5).

The policy surrounding the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) states that all children are entitled to 2 years free preschool. *The Early Years Sector Report 2017/2018* published by Pobal (2018)

welcomes an increase in the uptake of ECCE by Traveller children of 9%. However, CSO (2017) figures for the same period show a deficit of 40% of Traveller children in attendance, clearly, we have a long way to go!

*“I try so hard but when the hotel is pre-booked and we have to move for a week or so to emergency accommodation that is so far away the schools they will not take the children for the short time so we are missing out and then when we get back we are faced with a giving out from the other teacher, it’s all our fault and we could be the reason she has to close her doors, it’s easier to keep them [children] at home” (TP3).*

From experience, the Traveller parent can only see barriers in accessing education for their children *“I can’t do right for doing wrong” (TP6)*. In theory many policies and guidelines on inclusion and diversity have been put in place in Ireland over the past five years surrounding the area of access to ECCE for all children but in practice how inclusive are they? Are all children equal or are some more equal than others when it comes to inclusivity?

*“If my child was in a wheelchair, I’d say we would have no problem been accepted into that school” (TP7).*

This is an extreme statement by this parent, but it is what she experiences, she continues saying

*“I called to 6 preschools to book my child in but only one would accept me 3 told me that they were doing the place up for disabled children and that they could not take me because of this, I’m still not sure what they meant”.*

This research highlights that the amount of forms for completion to adhere to policy governing ECCE is a major stumbling block for Traveller families with CSO (2017) figures indicating 80% of Traveller adults cannot read or write and those that can have difficulty understanding.

*“I can read and write I learnt it in the primary school, but I need help I don’t understand those big words they do be using on the forms and things and I am embarrassed to ask the teacher. She is always busy talking to other mothers in the morning and doesn’t see me so I wouldn’t disturb her” (TP5).*

TP4 explains that neither her or her partner can read or write, and the forms are sitting at home on the table

*“we don’t know what to do, my partner says to keep the child at home it would be easier and not have those people looking down on us”.*

As discussed in chapter two, the Travelling people are a proud community and are slow to ask for help for fear of being put down or discriminated against (Pavee Point, 2015). The UN (1999) advocated education as a primary vehicle by which people can lift themselves out of poverty,

yet they state, educational discrimination against and exclusion of minorities is perpetuating poverty and depriving people of fulfilling their potential. The OECD (2018) data shows children from lower socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to have participated in pre-primary education even though, as far back as 1970, the DES identified young Traveller children as a category that would benefit from preschool education by acquainting them with the routine of the school, thus making it easier for them to settle into primary school.

*“My older boy is in primary school now and he never went to the preschool, the teacher is calling me in every day saying he can’t sit down and won’t do his work and she says he should have went to the preschool, like that’s easy for her to say she don’t understand what we go through” (TP4).*

#### **4.3.3 Policy and Practice (Preschool Practitioner’s Perspective)**

In practice, guidelines, such as the AIM, The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Chapter (DCYA, 2016) Siolta (DCYA, 2019) and Aister (DCYA, 201) or policies can be interpreted to suit the setting.

*“we had 2 members of staff here do the LINC training it’s great now that we can facilitate the children with disabilities, sure isn’t that what inclusion and equality is all about” (PP9).*

7 out of 10 practitioners interviewed stated that while the LINC training was good it was more about facilitating children with disabilities and not enough emphasis on the inclusion of children from diverse family backgrounds with PP1 stating;

*“They [Linc] really need to readdress their own understanding of inclusion and equality, while I empathise and perhaps sympathise there is more to inclusion and equality than disability”*

in agreement PP4 added

*“while it is important to include children of all abilities in ECCE we also need to include minorities and give support to children from disadvantaged backgrounds with special emphases for children from the Travelling Community which the LINC training did not address in any detail just a mention for the sake of it!”*

Alarming only four out of the ten practitioners admitted to having “someone in the setting” presently. Findings from the ‘Survey of Early Years Practitioners’ (DES, 2016) found that 21% of practitioners did not have enough knowledge of equality and diversity issues and alarmingly, 48% of practitioners interviewed stated they were not well prepared to cater for the educational

needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The remit of policies such as the Charter for Equality and Inclusion (2016) and LINC is to work to the benefit of all children not just a few.

*“you don’t turn any child away” (TP1).*

In agreement, Tusla (2014) recognise It is important to note that all these relatively recent developments keep the child at the centre of quality practice and recognise the significance of quality early childhood experiences. However, when you are from a community with no voice and as a direct result, of Government budgetary cuts (2010) no funding or spokes person for ECCE in the ITM’s 2017-2020 education strategy, you are limited in your ability to succeed. In line with this another policy barrier seen by practitioners is that Pobal (2018) allow a childcare provider to charge a refundable booking deposit to hold an ECCE place for a child. The maximum deposit a provider may charge is equivalent to four weeks’ ECCE payment which equates to €258. This may work against access to ECCE for children from the Travelling community with PP2and PP10 agreeing that this could be *“used against and not for inclusion”*.

*“In the name of God where would any family of a child from a disadvantaged background find this money, I know they will get it back when the child comes in but its just not feasible for many and I can see how it could work very well in facilitating exclusion for some settings, I mean would the primary school request this?” (PP1).*

The inability of 80% of Traveller adults to read and write is adversely effecting access to ECCE for children from the Travelling community as many of these parents are not aware of the challenges that are affecting practitioners in accepting children from the travelling community into their setting. The reasons put forward based on the policies that the setting must adhere to especially around funding will often sound like an excuse for exclusion and discrimination to the Traveller parent.

*“I swear to God they [parents] think I’m lying” (PP9).*

For the Traveller child to succeed in education the Parents of the Traveller child need support,

*“Mom needs to be supported, it only takes a few minutes to sit down and look at what is needed and fill out the forms, like what may seem so hard to someone else is easy for us we do it every day” (PP1).*



While all practitioners interviewed recognised the importance for ECCE for children from the Travelling community, they also all admitted that facilitating them especially around attendance can be exceedingly difficult. Pobal (2018) consider inspection of attendance records as a priority when conducting a setting audit stating

*“attendance records must be kept in an appropriate manner that is sufficient to establish actual duration of attendance of each named child for each ECCE session/room in terms of hours. The child’s name must be recorded in a consistent manner in order to facilitate identification of patterns of attendance (i.e. if the attendance records are weekly sheets, the child’s name should be in the same place each week). Weekly/monthly attendance records are preferable as they facilitate establishing patterns of attendance. Attendance records will be reviewed as a priority during compliance visits” (Pobal 2018:10).*

In this same document ‘Rules for ECCE Programme 2019/2020’ the DCYA argue that they [DCYA] are in a period of significant policy development and change in the early years sector, working with stakeholders to achieve a goal of high quality and accessible childcare for all. There appears to be some internal conflict of understanding here which according to PP1 the only solution being

*“...keep 1 or 2 places for children who need it, especially children from the Travelling community”* When asked about the potential loss of funding PP1 further explains *“ya I loose funding on it but I feel we have no option but to be a little bit flexible, no child can be left behind and no child is worth more or less than another, I have tried to explain this to the Pobal inspector and while he could see where I was coming from when he rang his supervisor he was told this was not possible, no amount of arguing the case worked and I lost €1000 there and then, I sill have the places kept though, policy will not change my values, it might close me down but at least I can feel confident that I am doing all I can for those who need it the most”.*

#### **4.4 Parent and Practitioner Relationships (Parent’s Perspective)**

Fundamentally, it is imperative that families and practitioners work together to promote learning outcomes in the home and school settings (Wilder, 2014; Yoder & Lopez, 2013; Jeynes, 2012, Carlisle et al., 2005; Fan et al., 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) where parents having equal rights and influence in the decision-making process of the ECCE setting (Hallet, 2016). Parents from the Travelling community are not used to being treated as equals. The experience and fear of discrimination dominate the lives of many Travellers.

*“I never had a happy time in school, other children called us smelly and dirty and we were not, we were very clean my mother was a proud woman she wouldn’t send us to school dirty and*

*the teacher never gave out to those children she just moved us from one seat to another always away from the settled children” (PP5).*

While it is accepted in the Republic of Ireland that “Traveller children should have access to an inclusive, well-resourced, well-managed, high-quality early-childhood education, with an appropriately trained staff operating in good-quality premises” (McNamara, 2006:32), a Northern Irish study ‘The adequacy of Traveller Education in Northern Ireland (2012), has concluded that while integrated educational provision is an important choice for many Travellers, other Travellers would choose segregated provision as the less risky option and preferred type of education for their children. (Hamilton et al., 2012). It could be argued that several factors contribute to the choices Traveller families make around early education, namely; prejudices felt and experienced by Travellers in the school setting, including the issue of the “...fear of bullying and discrimination” (Hamilton et al, 2012:517).

*“I can see how the Traveller only preschool would be a safe option, but we have to move on, I want my children to be proud of who they are but to also have choices in life and that is not going to happen if we stay hidden away where settled people don’t get to know us, we also fear the settled people and I don’t want that for them [children]” (TP6).*

All of Traveller parents interviewed for this study stated that they did not want to go back to school segregation, but they also stated that they needed support and a relationship to build between them and the preschool practitioner.

*“I see the teacher there in the morning, but she doesn’t see me, like I mean if she does, she doesn’t pretend to, I would love to have the confidence to go up and see how ‘Mary’ is getting on but I’d be afraid she would say something bad” (TP4).*

The relationship between the parent and the teacher can be an important factor in how well the child gets along in school. Studies have shown that parental involvement in their child’s education has a greater impact on the child’s learning than variables such as social class, level of parental education or parental income (Jackson and Harbison, 2014). Sheldon 2007 and Sheldon and Jung, 2015, concur, the effectiveness of parental involvement may perhaps be influenced by the link between family engagement and improved student attendance.

*“Somedays I feel invisible and I often fear that my child might get this feeling also, especially days when I am feeling very down and, on those days, I might even keep the child at home” (TP10).*

There was a mix of reactions to the question; *Do you as a parent feel welcome in the preschool setting?* However, this study shows that the settings that were familiar with Traveller children were the settings where the parents felt most welcome,

*“The staff are also helping me to toilet train because they know my difficulties”.*

Ceka and Murrati (2016) posit when parents involve themselves in the educational process of their children the outcome can usually be qualified as a positive and encouraging one.

*“Yes, I feel very welcome, thank god, and this makes things a little bit easy for me with all the other stress in my life at the moment. I can talk to the teachers here and let them know if something is going on at home and it may cause them [children] to act out in school. They are very understanding and know how to deal with him, so he won’t get the chance to be bold. They also ask me how I am and understand and give me a chance if I am late or even not turn up. Life gets very hard and it is helpful for me to know that my children are settled, if not at home, then at school” (TP5).*

Positive connections between parents and practitioners have been shown to improve children’s academic achievement, social competencies, and emotional well-being. When parents and teachers work as partners, children do better in school and at home. However, in situations where Traveller parents feel less welcome there is a knock-on effect to the children’s educational outcome. This is evident for the Travelling community where CSO (2017) figures show that out of approximately 3000 Travellers aged between seventeen and nineteen, only 3% (90) Travellers are reaching leaving Cert year with only 1% (30) going on to third level.

*“I don’t be asked to any parties or gatherings like and the children don’t be asked to parties, its not fair on the children like they never asked for any of this, I would love if they could go somewhere nobody knows them, and they could pretend that they had a lovely home” (TP3).*

Even though Traveller parents did not have the experience of preschool themselves they do see the advantages and benefits of it for their own children with TP1 stressing that

*“Our children need to be educated if not we are entering cycle after cycle of disadvantage and fear, fear of the settled community and their fear of us. This is causing the trouble and the bad press. Preschool is where we need to start or even before with mother and babies’ groups, if we can show people, they have nothing to fear from us our children will feel accepted and be able to have a life they can be proud of, able to read and write and work and be accepted”*

All parents interviewed for this study agreed that positive parent/teacher relationships were key to their children attending preschool.

*“I have less stress and worry if I know the children are happy. She [teacher] has an understanding of our ways and she understands why sometimes we don’t turn up or are late. My husband suffers very badly from depression and he sometimes has to go to St Stephens hospital up in Cork and then the children have to be minded by their granny and they do not go to school.” (TP3).*

As discussed in chapter two, research has been consistent in its findings that Early Years Education is beneficial for children in continuing education and positive life outcomes (UNSECO, 2017; Packer 2017; Ceka and Murati, 2016; Murray, 2012; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). The Perry School Project is an example of this. The results of this study found that adults at age 40 who underwent the preschool program had higher earnings, committed fewer crimes; were more likely to hold a job, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have a preschool education (Highscope Educational Research Foundation, 2018).

*“Well the twins (girls) went to preschool and the teachers were so nice and included them in everything, some of the friends they made there are still their friends and they are just after getting their confirmation now with all their friends and they are looking so forward to going to secondary school, one wants to be a nurse and the other a teacher. As for the boys, I have 3 boys and none of them finished their schooling, they did not go to preschool and never properly settled in primary school, they just didn’t know what to do and the teachers used to get so cross with them I had a path worn up to the school door, they couldn’t wait to leave because the teacher was constantly down on them. It filtered through to a lot of the other children and they never made friends outside their own community and they never even did the junior cert and they could have, you know, they were far from stupid” (TP8).*

#### **4.4.1 Parent and Practitioner Relationships (Practitioners’ Perspective)**

*“Children can show signs of being influenced by societal norms and biases and many exhibit pre-prejudice towards other on the basis of gender or race ...” (Derman-Sparks 1989:2)*

Parent teacher relationships do not just happen they are built over time through communication, trust and a common interest.

*“We have a large Traveller community in the area here and they are generational so I have had Traveller children attending over the years and I now have parents I would have had here as children coming with their children and it is great for building up the relationships, they know me and they know they can trust me” (PP8).*

It is important for the practitioner to understand that parents from the Travelling community do not have favourable experiences of school themselves as seen from the interview answers. This may impact on how they engage with the service providers so therefore it is important that practitioners ensure that Traveller parents feel involved and consulted in relation to their child’s development Siolta (DCYA, 2019). McNamara (2006) recognises the need for the preschool service provider to understand that adults like children, all have different needs and temperaments, and this can be due to their background, Traveller parents for example cannot always be certain that their child will be welcome in the school setting treated fairly and with respect.

*“This Traveller man called to the school one day with his child, he wanted to bring him in there and then. Now I know this man and he can be rather vocal, if you know what I mean, I told him we were full, we did have a place if I am being honest but I couldn’t risk my staff being stopped by him in the street if something was not to his liking in the school, I have to protect my staff from this like” (PP7).*

It could be argued that direct, indirect or felt prejudices, which may stem from the early years setting about the Family of the Traveller child may impact upon the child’s access to a particular setting or to the Traveller child’s participation within the setting. (Murray et al, 2006; Murray, 2012; McNamara, 2006) and as a result rhetoric such as this can filter in an unconsciousness manner into the settings atmosphere. The hidden curriculum can impact on how children interact and relate to each other, Butler (2018) contends that if children are taught in an environment where every child is accepted, welcomed and valued they will learn in turn to accept and value each other. Therefore, as *“...Traveller communities have shifted their emphasis towards a greater desire for formal education dictated by concerns for their children’s futures”* (Myers et al., 2010: 545), this move towards participation should be matched by early years’ services engagement through extra supports for traveller families along with the full implementation of Aistear (NCCA, 2009), Siolta, (2006) Equality and Diversity Guidelines and first 5, the identity and Belonging Streams of both Siolta and Aistear, the quality frameworks, and Equality and Diversity upskilling (Cuddihy, 2016).

Traveller Parents felt most welcome in an ECCE setting that understood and were respectful of the challenges that the Travelling community face in their ability to access ECCE essentially in a culturally sensitive setting.

*“The Traveller children are so good, and they love coming in, we meet mom at the door and have a little chat with her, we see if there is anything, we need to know about the situation at home that might impact on the child’s behaviour. If there is, we log it in our notes and appoint a key worker to that child for the session to make sure all their needs are met, and any problems can be dealt with in an understanding and respectful manner” (PP1).*

First Five (2019) recommend that attitudes around challenging bias and respecting difference need to be considered in the ethos of all childcare services. For this to be achieved the Expert Working Group recommended rolling out the *Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers* nationally, in conjunction with “mandatory training and support for diversity and equality practice” (Right from the Start, 2013: 21). These guidelines were published in 2016 by the DCYA, however as previously mentioned many practitioners have complained that the overbearing emphasis is on the child with disabilities and accommodating them in the classroom setting with changes to structure to facilitate equipment. While this is essential for these children, they agree, there was not enough on the needs of children from minority groups such as the Travelling community.

*“I was very disappointed with the AIM training, I was expected it to give all children that need support a fair playing field, I came back to my setting feeling that in some ways I had wasted my time” (PP1).*

PP3 in agreement expresses the need for more training to be included for children from the Travelling community *“not a mention until it was brought to the attention of the tutor that there was more to inclusion than disability”*. Barnardos, 2017 concur that training for staff is needed to help them to support parents to develop links with other services including self-development and parenting programmes, this they maintain helps parents to feel empowered and gives them the tools to expand their own coping skills.

Preschool practitioners need to ensure that all children in their setting feel included and welcome. The parent/practitioner relationship is perhaps one of the most important. Barnardos (2017) argue that the benefits for the children come, in seeing their parents involved in things that direct them directly, while, for the parents, it increases the sense of belonging and of being

included in their child's learning. The benefits are crucial for the service as it makes them aware of parents' perspectives and using this knowledge to help inform policies and practices.

*"I know the Traveller families around here and I know what they have to put up with. Young children cannot be punished for 'the sins of the father' all children need a chance in life and the mothers of the Traveller children in my setting want what is best for their children and it is my job to provide them with all the support they need and communication is the most important thing, well that and a good respectful relationship with mom, when mom goes away relaxed with a smile on her face we actually can see the children visibly relax" (PPI).*

PP8 in agreement states that *"when we come together as a group to support a common goal the group becomes stronger than the sum of its parts"*.

#### **4.5 Traveller Culture – Inclusion and Equality (Parents' Perspective)**

*"We got in touch with the teachers and explained that the Traveller children were different, they want to learn about their own culture and don't want to hide it. They'd been living in fear of being a Traveller" (Joyce and Farmer, 1985:X).*

As discussed previously in chapter 2, Travellers share a common ancestry, have fundamental cultural values and traditions, have their own language, and see themselves as distinct and different (and this is now being recognised by the introduction of Traveller culture and history in to the curriculum). Dooley (2014) further explains Irish Travellers have been documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have a long-shared history, culture, customs, and traditions. The distinctive Traveller lifestyle and culture based on a nomadic tradition sets Travellers apart from the sedentary population. Over the years and due to the decline of the traditional Traveller trades such as tin-smithing and farm labouring the Travelling community have been forced to settle in the somewhat hostile environment of the settled community.

*"One woman said to me Travellers should be burned"; this was a Christian woman, that goes to mass on a Sunday, a good Catholic" (Joyce and Farmer, 1985:110).*

A settled Traveller is still a Traveller they still have their traditions and cultures and it is especially important to them.

*“we are proud we are, and we will not forget our ways and we want the children to remember who they are and where they come from, family is everything” (TP6)*

Many practitioners in this study claim to have a fully inclusive setting but if your setting is not wheelchair accessible are you fully inclusive? Likewise, if you are not familiar with the culture of the children in your setting how can you prepare an inclusive curriculum? Inclusion should weave seamlessly like a thread through every core of the preschool curriculum and all children should be represented in this curriculum equally (NCCA, 2009).

*“Our Travelling culture is probably the most important thing we have, it is all we can call our own, everything else has been taken from us” (TP3).*

According to Pavee Point (2017) Travellers are born with their own ethnic identity

*“my children are Travellers they were born Travellers and they will die Travellers” (TP5)*

On the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017 after many years of campaigning the Travelling community was given recognition as an ethnic minority in Ireland. Defined as belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition, ethnicity is not the same as nationality or place of birth. Your ethnicity or cultural background means the group you descended from. An ethnic group is made up by people who share certain characteristics such as culture, language, religion and traditions.

*“It is hard for us to entrust our children to the teachers, like in Traveller culture the children are the heart of the community and know they are loved and supported, and we worry that they will not be treated as they should be” (TP3).*

Attitudes around challenging bias and respecting difference need to be considered in the ethos of childcare services. (Right from the Start, 2013/First 5 2018). Respecting difference is not just putting a horseshoe on the wall it is about the practitioner taking the time to learn and understand the significance of that horseshoe to the Travelling community. If you can create a common interest and respect with the child, then you are creating an inclusive environment.

*“One day ‘Paddy’ came home from school very upset, he said the teacher was cross at him because he told her that because she had cut her hair no man would ever marry her (laughs). I had to go in and explain to her that was the way he was brought up and that the Traveller girls hair was their treasure, I wish she would take the time to understand us a bit better, like if she asked me to explain some of our traditions to her she might be less likely to judge or get upset” (TP9).*



Pavee Point (2010) contend that a contributing factor to the low levels of attainment of Travellers in Education is the lack of visibility of Traveller culture within the education system. This they claim may contribute to feelings of isolation experienced by Traveller children. Janelidze (2014) in agreement states that understanding cultural diversity and building culturally sensitive practices has become a central issue in ensuring that all children are welcomed and included equally. These values are enshrined in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) ratified by the Irish Government in 1992 states that all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives and respects their family, cultural and other identities, and languages. Aistear's (NCCA, 2009) theme of identity and belonging recognises the importance of cultural identity and its inclusion in the curriculum framework in a setting by stating that all Children should be proud of their identity and that the children and their family and community should feel respected and accepted in the ECCE environment. Pavee Point (2010) concurs, that it is especially important for all children to feel confident and positive in their own identity in school, however, they state that unfortunately, many Traveller children are aware that their identity will pose a problem for them in school.

*“My older children are not mad about school, they want to leave as soon as they can, they say that nobody understands them and that I am stupid wanting to send the younger ones to school cause they will only be bullied and the younger ones are listening to this and starting to fear going” (TP4).*

However, where the preschool practitioner takes the time to gain a knowledge of Traveller culture the experience for the child and the parent can be extremely rewarding.

*“She [the teacher] is great she always welcomes him [child] every morning she says welcome ‘TJ’ I wonder what great things we will learn today. We love to tell stories they are passed down from father to son and mother to daughter and the teacher always asks the child to tell his stories when the other children are telling theirs and its great because they are learning from each other and they all love the stories. Like one day he came home and said that another boy asked could he be his friend because they had horses too” (TP7).*

Children are not born pre-judging it is the attitudes of society that form this prejudice in their mind.

*“You see that’s the problem in this country its all about fitting in and if you don’t fit in you will be left out” (TP3).*

The ITM (2018) explains how most schools have systematically failed to recognise Traveller culture and Traveller’s way of life is invisible across the school setting. As a result, non-Traveller children are denied the opportunity to learn about Traveller culture in a positive environment, thus increasing the chances of their views being formed by the negative stereotypical views of Travellers that persist in the wider society

#### **4.5.1 Traveller Culture – Inclusion and Equality (Practitioner Perspective)**

*Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal cultural and linguistic identity validated. (Siolta, DCYA, 2019).*

Barnardos (2017) in supporting developing relationships explain that as the child develops and begins to form relationships with their peers and caregivers outside the family, their personal and social identities start to emerge. A child’s identity is a powerful sense of knowing who they are, and how others see them.

*“We love the stories, they are actually the highlight of the day. The children love them as well. The Traveller art of story telling is so rich and so unique and we learn so much about their (the child) life from them” (PP1).*

Bronfenbrenner (1989) places the practitioner/ teacher in the child’s microsystem. This puts the preschool practitioner in a perfect position to develop awareness and understanding whilst creating respect for difference. *“Early years care and education in Ireland has an open curriculum, and it is up to individual services to reflect their ethos in whatever way they believe is appropriate” (Barnardos, 2017:11)* (however it it has to be based on the princpples of Aistear and Siolta). This can be a barrier for Children from the Travelling community in accessing ECCE (DCYA, 2019)

*“We follow a curriculum in this setting that we consider fully inclusive to the children in our setting. We have children from many cultures whose parents work in the community, in hospitals and in multinational companies and our ethos or philosophy is to make sure that are all welcomed equally. Like we have days when we celebrate different foods etc., We would not take a child from the Travelling community as I feel they would not fit in to the ethos of this setting and anyway I have to look out for my staff” (PP7).*

Adults are not immune to negative thoughts about diversity and according to the (DCYA, 2016a) all of us have prejudices about something. In this study only 4 out of 10 practitioners interviewed admitted to embracing the Traveller culture, even though the literature review suggested the need for continuous CPD in the preschool sector. In line with Siolta (CECDE 2006 and Aistear (NCCA, 2009) guidelines.

*“The local Travelling community hold culture days here in the public library about 3 times a year. We always bring the children from the preschool down to see the lovely blankets and shawls they make and to hear the stories about the old way of life. They are fascinated by it and they are always wanting to hear more from the Travelling children in our setting. The Traveller children are so proud when we go, and they show us pictures of their families and horses that are on display” (PP8).*

The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 will create a mandatory direction to include Traveller culture and history within the State-sponsored primary and secondary school educational curriculum. Currently, in the absence of such a requirement, there is little to no teaching of Traveller culture, heritage, or their unique position as Ireland’s only indigenous minority group. The passing of the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 will instil, among all children, pride in and respect for the diversity of our shared Irish heritage.

*“We do try to have culture days, like we celebrate the Chinese culture and Indian culture and parents come in and show us what they eat but like we don’t have Traveller children here but if we had sure how would they show us I’m sure they eat normal stuff, do they?” (PP2).*

This lack of understanding of culture in the ECCE setting is alarming and common unfortunately. It is so necessary to foster a more welcoming pre-school environment for Traveller children and be a means to end the myths and lies that underpin racism, prejudice, and discrimination that Travellers experience daily. Only 4 out of the 10 practitioners interviewed had drawn up their own inclusion policy based on the Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion charter (2016).

*“We have developed our own diversity and equality policy here with guidance from the Diversity and Equality and inclusion 2016 guidelines, it is great to have these guidelines to follow but with respect to Traveller culture I feel personally there is not enough, I mean like a couple of pages with little information is not enough to be able to understand the complexities that is the Travelling community, it is not enough to dispel the myths and lies that are engrained in Irish society” (PP1).*

2 out of 10 practitioners interviewed said that Traveller culture would not be a concern for them as they would not be taking children from that community.

*“...with respect to the parents and staff, it would not be feasible, that’s what we have the community settings for” (PP9).*

Another 4 practitioners said that they will in the future give time to this but that at present their inclusion policies were more to cover children with disabilities and their children and that children from the Travelling community will have to settle in around this.

*“Traveller children are welcome here, but I cannot be chasing after them, they will have to fit in and attend and understand the rules and policies like everyone else, like we give the parents the same introduction pack as we give to all parents. Our priority is for the children with the disabilities and we are doing AIM here to make our setting inclusive” (PP3).*

Traveller culture is a term that is used a lot but that is also misunderstood a lot. *“The children are not Travellers sure they are living in the Terrace up the road” (PP10).* Even though up to 83% of Travellers are now settled (CSO, 2017), for many this is not by choice, it is still a vital part of their identity and culture. Liégeois (1994, p.79) noted, *“whereas a sedentary person retains a sedentary mind-set even when travelling, Gypsies and Travellers, even when not travelling remain nomadic. Even when they stop, they are still Travelling People”.* There needs to be a better understanding of culture in most pre-schools to ensure that Traveller children are included, welcomed and understood.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. It analysed both Traveller parents and preschool practitioners’ perspectives regarding the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) and the challenges that young Traveller children and their parents encounter in accessing same. It was interesting to see that while the perspectives of the parents were very different from the perspectives of the practitioners both identified the many challenges that were encountered in accessing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). Practitioners were most challenged by Pobal’s stringent funding criteria, whereas the parents found that challenges around the Traveller way of life which meant that they were often late or absent. Traveller Parents welcomed the end of Traveller only preschools in favour of an all-inclusive option, notably most of the Traveller children are attending community preschools only. This is interesting as both private and community services provide the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). This chapter merges the qualitative data and the literature providing a robust image of the challenges that young

Traveller children and their parents encounter in accessing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). It also identifies the challenges that preschool practitioners encounter when accepting children from the Traveller community in Ireland.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

## **5.1 Introduction**

This last chapter brings together all the material in the thesis. It then goes on to make a series of recommendations based on an analysis of the findings. This final chapter provides pathways to deal with some of the challenges highlighted in the study and presents an overall conclusion along with recommendations. To eliminate bias in the reporting of same, the limitations of this research are also clearly stated. A qualitative approach was adopted in this body of work to investigate the components that determine the challenges that Traveller children encounter when accessing ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) from practitioners and parental perspectives. These findings produced concerning evidence that unfortunately is in line with the Irish Traveller Movement's (ITM, 2017) acknowledgement that there has been little research since the budgetary cuts of 2010 on the low enrolment of Traveller children in preschools. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children (2016) also concurs and this is emblematic of the fact that Traveller children are entering primary school at a disadvantage. The recommendations that have emerged from this research are presented below.

## **5.2 Recommendations for Future Research and Implications for Practice**

This study was prompted by the ITM's (2017) acknowledgement that there has been little research in this area since the budgetary cuts of 2010. These cuts, both Pavee Point (2018) and the ITM (2017) agree impacted negatively on Travellers through the abolishment of Traveller only preschools. Moreover, the low enrolment outlined by Pobal (2018) which was compiled from the 2016 Census shows there are 12,313 Irish Traveller children (aged birth to 14 years), of whom 5,199 were aged between birth and 6 years, resident in Ireland (26 counties). According to the data from Pobal (2018) 25% of Traveller children, from birth to 14 years (2,633), were attending an early years-service. Fundamentally, however, just under half (47%) of Traveller children in early years services availed of the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). This is although, according to the DES (2016; 2002) and McNamara (2006) Traveller children should have access to an inclusive, well resourced, professionally managed, high quality early childhood education. UNESCO (2006) advise that

‘Education systems need to be responsive to the specific educational needs of all minority groups. Among the issues to be considered is how to foster the cultural, social and economic vitality of such communities through effective and adequate educational programmes that are based on the cultural perspectives and orientations of the learners, while at the same time providing for the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable them to participate fully in the larger society’ (UNESCO, 2006: 17).

The following recommendations are based on this study.

### **5.2.1 Recommendation 1: National Database**

Arising from the findings in research question 1, the researcher suggests that a national data base is introduced to ascertain where Traveller children are attending any ECCE especially as statistics are showing that up to and above 40% of Traveller children are not attending ECCE. In doing so this may highlight the resources that are essential within these services in certain areas to combat the low attendance documented. This information could be gathered by practitioners during the completion of registration forms in September and the results correlated and compared annually at national level. This will give a better indication as to where Traveller children are accessing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). This research indicates that Traveller children are accessing and attending community settings but both community and private settings are getting the same government funding to provide a universal service that should accept and welcome every child.

### **5.2.2 Recommendation 2: Pobal and DCYA Funding**

Arising from research question 2 which asks: What are the challenges that Traveller children face when accessing ECCE (DCYA, 2019). The researcher recommends, in line with the difficulties that practitioner’s expressed in complying with the stringent and often unyielding funding compliance of Pobal audits, that compliance changes need to happen to help Traveller children access and benefit from ECCE (DCYA, 2019). There needs to be a greater understanding of the challenges that Traveller children and their families encounter in accessing ECCE (DCYA, 2019). Pobal need to embrace a culturally sensitive approach and an understanding that every day attendance may not be possible for many traveller children due the various challenges they encounter, as outlined in chapter four and the transient nature of



the Travelling community. This researcher suggests that this is an urgent necessity as all the ECCE practitioners interviewed agreed that this was a major barrier for them, especially in the area of funding and the loss of therein, when accepting children from the Travelling community.

### **5.2.3 Recommendation 3: Parental Partnership**

Research question 3 identified the challenges that exist for the successful integration of Traveller children to mainstream ECCE settings. Arising from the findings this researcher recommends that strategies are put in place to ensure that parents from the Travelling community are included, supported, and welcomed within the ECCE settings. This is in line with Siolta's standard no 3 (parents and families) (CECDE, 2006) and with Aistear's Guidelines on Building Partnership between parents and practitioners (NCCA, 2006). Lopez *et al.*, (2004), stress that family involvement predicts children's school success. This acceptance of Traveller culture and flexibility in relation to facilitating Traveller families would, this researcher believes, open up a sustained dialogue and engagement with Traveller parents and children which would help to promote a partnership going forward through primary school, secondary school, and finally on to 3<sup>rd</sup> level helping to increase the numbers of Traveller children in education which in turn will improve their life-long opportunities. All the Traveller Parents interviewed for this study expressed a desire for their children to receive an education, therefore these parents are already open to being involved and included within the ECCE (DCYA, 2019) and school system. The researcher suggests that practitioners should reach out to the Traveller organisations in their areas. These organisations are a gateway to opening a dialogue in which Traveller parents can feel secure and confident to discuss any concerns they may have regarding their children's education. Even though there are guidelines outlined in the 2016 charter for inclusion and equality many of the practitioners in this study expressed the concern that they did not go far enough for the inclusion of the Traveller community and therefore this the researcher recommends that more CPD funding in the area of Traveller inclusion should include details and information on how to communicate with members of minority communities including the Traveller community in a respectful and acceptable manner. This is important as the challenges these children face is different to most

children in ECCE settings, these include homelessness, parental mental health issues, parental low literacy levels, discrimination and prejudice and health concerns.

A designated, well informed and empathetic staff member should be appointed to the child so that if there are concerns from the parent, child or setting a relationship and connection will already be there allowing for these issues to be resolved with the least amount of disruption to all parties concerned. This member of staff should engage in training available in this area, for example, Traveller Cultural Awareness Training (TCAT) AIM, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion training (2016).

#### **5.2.4 Recommendation 4: Initial Professional Education (IPE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**

The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 which passed by Seanad Éireann on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019 and is currently before Dáil Éireann, Second Stage, will make teaching Traveller culture and history mandatory in schools across Ireland with the aim to prevent the persistent discrimination. At present this is aimed towards primary schools but in line with the findings from this research we would recommend that the NCCA include a similar programme for implementation in ECCE. The NCCA (2019) have suggested that early childhood practitioners need to be supported and educated on pedagogies to support intercultural education. They stress that efforts should be made to develop knowledge and understanding of aspects of Traveller history and culture for practitioners. The NCCA (2019) also emphasises the importance of engaging with children, students, parents, teachers / early childhood practitioners and the community to promote cultural diversity, tolerance, respect, and cultural heritage.

An area of training that is showing great success is the Yellow Flag Programme which brings issues of inter-culturalism, equality, and diversity into the whole-school programme. This is currently being run for primary schools but this researcher believes that it could be adapted to work with ECCE setting allowing for younger children to get an understanding of diversity and inclusion and also for the continuous professional development of ECCE practitioners. The NCCA (2019) in agreement state *'It would be beneficial if the Yellow Flag Programme was to be extended to include Early Childhood Settings'* (NCCA 2019:136).

The research also recognises that, of all people under the protection act in Ireland almost 10% are from the Traveller community, even though this same community equates to under 1% of the population of Ireland (26 counties). Therefore, this leads to a recommendation that research be carried out to identify why and if it is related to trauma and discrimination experienced in the early years of their lives. We need to improve how we engage with Travellers and be cognisant that the ECCE programmes we provide are culturally and trauma sensitive least we fuel the preschool to prison pipeline.

Another area of training which is a requisite for the successful inclusion of Traveller children and their families in education is Traveller Cultural Awareness Training (TCAT). This Traveller Cultural Awareness Training Programme is an initiative developed by the Regional Traveller Health Network in association with the Health Promotion Department of the HSE using a co-production approach. The programme is delivered by Traveller Community Health Workers and aims to improve Travellers' health through the provision of education on Traveller culture to health service staff and other public service staff so to make their services more accessible and thus have an impact on Traveller health outcomes. The researcher believes if this training were further developed to enable it to be extended to the Irish educational system and included in Early Childhood Ireland's continuous professional Development (CPD) programmes it would be beneficial in ensuring that Traveller children receiving an education comparable to their settled counterparts.

The role of the adult in supporting quality early childhood experiences for young children is 'absolutely' central and it requires regular reflection upon practice and engagement in supported, ongoing professional development (Siolta, Standard 11 Professional Practice, CECDE, 2006:2). In line with this, this researcher recommends that fully funded CPD on how to promote the inclusion of Traveller children should be made available to all practitioners and other stakeholders associated in the delivery of key services for Traveller children and their families.

This CPD should be regular and not just for the pre-school practitioners but also for the Pobal inspectorate (in line with the concerns voiced by many of the practitioners interviewed). Research as far back as the mid-nineties states that underachievement of Traveller children in education is recognised as a major problem with some of the lowest levels of achievement

found in schools serving the Travelling community (Loftus, 2017; Weir *et al.*, 2017; DES, 2005; Kelly, 1995,1996; Demie, 1998; Mortimore & Whitty, 1997).

#### **5.2.5 Recommendation 5: Supporting Traveller children's identity and belonging in ECCE**

It is important to note that all parents in this study want their children to be identified as Travellers during the enrolment in ECCE. The Travelling community is an immensely proud race of people. They are proud of their history and traditions and they want their children to carry on this pride in who they are. However, Many Travellers have reported negative memories of their own schooling (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010). The damage done by the segregated model of education for Travellers, that was in place up until the 1990s, can still be felt today as Lynch and Lodge (2004) explain parents of many school-aged Traveller children received a substandard education in segregated schools and classrooms in the not so distant past which has led to many of these Traveller parents being illiterate. It is fundamental that practitioners are trained to take the time to support families and to ensure that they have an understanding as to how to support a Traveller child's identity in line with the recommendations from Siolta (standard 14) (CECDE, 2006) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009). Need more CPD on Aistear Siolta and an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum.

#### **5.2.6 Recommendation 6: Reflective Practice and Critical Reflection**

As human beings we all carry prejudices and as a result we need to challenge our own attitudes, values and beliefs which are implicit in the learning environment (Butler, 2003). Travellers are not a homogeneous group and as practitioners it is essential that assumptions are not made. Ensuring that practitioners are encouraged to engage in reflective practice at initial training and during CPD is essential so that his habit of challenging our assumptions and respecting all children and their families will go a long way to ensuring that all children are valued.

### 5.3 Research Strengths

- The rich information given to the researcher from parents of children from the Travelling Community was a major strength to this study. Their lived experiences, honesty and emotional inputs were a key enabler for this study to be compiled.
- Many studies that have examined the theme of ECCE have focused on practitioners' perspectives, but few have sought parental perspectives (Fenech *et al.*, 2010) especially around Traveller parents (ITM, 2017). This study includes the voice of parents from the Travelling community which to the author's knowledge, is the first study in Ireland to assess these opinions since the cuts to Traveller education in the 2010 budget.
- Another strength of this research was the willingness of practitioners to share their knowledge, skill, and experience of working with young children from the Travelling community as well as on the ECCE Scheme (2010/2019).
- This study identified recommendations for the many challenges faced by both Travellers and practitioners including paperwork, Pobal compliance, funding for settings and the cost of running a quality practice. The study also identified recommendations for the challenges that Traveller parents, in particular faced. These included, literacy levels, fear, homelessness and health issues, lack of understanding, fear of discrimination and a strong desire for their children to receive an education comparable with the settled community.

### 5.4 Research Limitations

- One of the main limitations of the study is that this was a small-scale study. It was difficult to identify Travellers who were willing to participate.
- Most of the participants were female in this study, so the male voice is not included. The study was a representation of the Munster area and as a result was a small study and may not be the indicative of the other provinces.
- The opinion of the Traveller child was not included, and this would have perhaps added another level of information that could have enhanced the study further. This would

have also upheld the UN convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children should be visible and should have a voice.

## **5.5 Overall Conclusion**

This study explored and identified the challenges that Traveller Children experience in accessing ECCE in the Republic of Ireland since the introduction of the ECCE scheme (DYCA, 2019). The viewpoints of both ECCE service providers and Traveller parents are highlighted. This study has illustrated some of the challenges that Traveller children encounter in accessing ECCE.

The chaotic conditions in which Traveller children live include homelessness, living in emergency accommodation, overcrowding in accommodation along with the low educational attainments of their parents. These can lead to missed opportunities for ECCE attendance. The introduction of the ECCE scheme as part of the 2010 budgetary measures was welcomed as it contributed to a growing awareness of the importance of the early years in children's lives and development. However, ITM (2011) argued that these budgetary cuts to Traveller education were short sighted and undermined Traveller's integration and potential future educational and career opportunities as they cut all supports. While the parents in this study agree that the policy move from Traveller only preschools to a universal ECCE scheme (2010, 2019) was a good thing there are significant barriers that are prohibiting Traveller children from accessing their rightful place in the scheme. The main one being the inflexible funding approach to the scheme as operationalised through POBAL inspections. While there is a 96% take up of the scheme nationally only 47% of Traveller children are attending so much needs to be done to address these appalling statistics.

The objective of this study was to explore areas identifying where supports are needed for the successful integration of Traveller children into the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). It looked at both parents and preschool practitioners' responses to set questions through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The themes, Stakeholders initial response to the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019), Challenges encountered by both preschool practitioners and parents in relation to Traveller children accessing ECCE (DCYA, 2019), Parent and practitioner relationships, Traveller culture – inclusion and equality and Policies and practices, were identified from the responses of the participants during these interviews. These themes which are, were then

discussed and presented in the results chapter which provided an in-depth analysis of the challenges that young Traveller families experience in assessing ECCE along with the challenges faced by practitioners in providing ECCE places for Traveller children. The information attained from this analysis identified the flaws and gaps in the delivery of the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019) for children from the Travelling community in Ireland.

This study contributed to a deeper understanding in areas such as family involvement, compliance with ECCE regulations around funding and the professional opinions of practitioners. Although, numerous quality components were identified, equally so were the various challenges, including prejudice, discrimination, funding issues for practitioners, and homelessness, parental educational experience and attainment, and health issues that exist for Traveller children when accessing ECCE (DCYA, 2019). Essentially, Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) acts as a valid framework for this study, particularly highlighting the powerful influences on the lives of Traveller children and their families in accessing the ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's focus is on the child in society and this considers a re-think of the provision of ECCE (DCYA, 2019) for Traveller children. Fundamentally, engaging with Traveller children and their families necessitates offering a culturally sensitive ECCE scheme (DCYA, 2019), where trust, rapport, respect, and awareness are key and where prejudice is a thing of the past.

*'Because myth forms people's perceptions of one another. Its all they have the only mirror where they can see the other who might be a stranger to them' (Ward 2009:5).*

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# **Appendices**

## **Interview Questions for Traveller Parents**

1. Tell me a little about yourself?
2. What was your experience of the education system in Ireland?
3. What makes a good preschool for children from Traveller Community?
4. What makes a bad preschool for Traveller Children?
5. What would put you off sending your child to pre-school?
6. Can you explain what would encourage you to send your child to pre-school?
7. What would encourage you to send your child to a particular setting?
8. Does the preschool setting recognise and appreciate your culture?
9. Do you as a parent feel welcome in the preschool setting?
10. Do you think/feel that traveller children would be best served in a preschool specifically for them and their culture? Please explain

## **Interview Questions for Pre-school Practitioner/teacher**

1. Can you tell me a bit about your setting?
2. Can you tell me a little about the children who attend your setting?
3. Can you tell me about the schemes you offer here?
4. Have you ever had children from the Travelling Community attending your service? If yes: please explain. If no: would children from the travelling community be welcomed here? Please explain
5. What do children from the TC need in order to feel accepted and welcomed?
6. Do you think/feel that traveller children be best served in a preschool specifically for them and their culture? Please explain
7. What would your concerns be in accepting TC in to your setting?
  - Parents
  - Hygiene
  - Behaviour management/ guidance
  - Cultural differences: language, manners etc.
8. Have you completed any equality and diversity training? Please explain
9. What do practitioners need in order to educate and care for children from the Traveller Community effectively?
10. The title of this study is 'Prejudice and Participation - An investigation into Challenges surrounding access to Early Childhood Care and Education for Children from the Travelling Community in Ireland'. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that I should have and what would be your answer?



Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

RE: 'Prejudice and Participation. An Investigation into Challenges surrounding access to Early Childhood Care and Education for Children from the Traveller Community in Ireland'

My name is Denise Baker. I am currently undertaking a Research Masters at Cork Institute of Technology. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the challenges that Traveller children experience in gaining access to the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) in Ireland.

I am inviting you to participate in this study as I believe you have the appropriate knowledge and experience to be of benefit to the study. There are no known risks from being in this study and you will not benefit personally, however as a result of this study, recommendations will be made in the hope of improving the lives of Traveller children attending ECCE (preschool). Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can choose to opt out at any time. The information you provide will be kept completely confidential and your participation is totally anonymous.

I am writing to invite you to participate in this research. Participation in the research involves completing an in-depth semi-structured interview and should take no longer than 45 minutes.

I have attached an information sheet on the study and if you would like to find out more please contact me on mobile [REDACTED] and by email [REDACTED]

Many thanks,

yours faithfully,

---

Denise Baker,

Masters student

Letter to Pre-school Practitioners

Dear Pre-school Practitioners,

RE: 'Prejudice and Participation. An Investigation into Challenges surrounding access to Early Childhood Care and Education for Children from the Traveller Community in Ireland'

My name is Denise Baker. I am currently undertaking a Research Masters at Cork Institute of Technology. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the challenges that Traveller children experience in gaining access to the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) in Ireland.

I am inviting you to participate in this study as I believe you have the appropriate knowledge and experience to be of benefit to the study. There are no known risks from being in this study and you will not benefit personally, however as a result of this study, recommendations will be made in the hope of improving the lives of Traveller children attending ECCE (preschool). Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can choose to opt out at any time. The information you provide will be kept completely confidential and your participation is totally anonymous.

I am writing to invite you to participate in this research. Participation in the research involves completing an in-depth semi-structured interview and should take no longer than 45 minutes.

I have attached an information sheet on the study and if you would like to find out more please contact me on mobile [REDACTED] and by email [REDACTED]

Many thanks,

Yours faithfully,

---

Denise Baker

Masters Student

## Letter of Consent

Title of Study:

Prejudice and Participation.

An Investigation into Challenges surrounding access  
to Early Childhood Care and Education for Children from the Traveller Community  
in Ireland

Informed Consent:

Date:

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the challenges that Traveller children experience in gaining access to high quality well resourced Early Childhood Education in Ireland. This study will examine how the inclusion of Traveller children into mainstream pre-schools has been achieved. The study will specifically look at the numbers of Traveller children visible in mainstream settings and how Travellers are affected by the various prejudices they encounter and other challenges which have impacted upon their ability to access Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

We are inviting you to partake in this study. There are no known risks from bring in this study and you will not benefit personally, however, we hope that others may benefit from what we learn because of this study.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can choose to opt out at any time. The information you provide will be kept completely confidential and your participation is totally anonymous.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact:

Denise Baker

Dept of Sports, Leisure and Childhood Studies

Email: [REDACTED]

Mob: [REDACTED]

#### **Example of funding as explained by PP10 chapter 4**

Higher Capitation = 80.25 per child per week for 11 children (covering ratio 1:11) = €882.75

1 room leader (level 7 at a minimum) €14 per hour for 5 days at 3 hours per day = €210.00

(not including employers PRSI)

€882.75 - €210.00 = €672.72 divided by 5 days = €134.54 divided by 11 (children) = 12.23

per child per day = €4.07 per child per hour to cover the following:

Food, Educational supplies, Rent of premises, insurance, Rates, Utilities etc.,