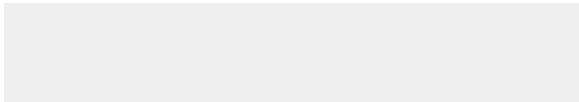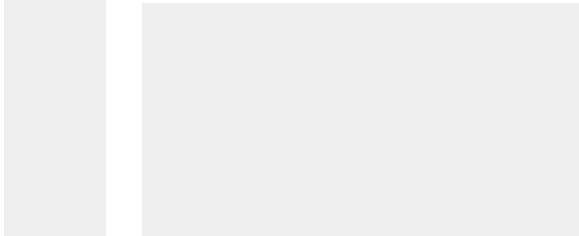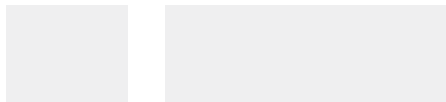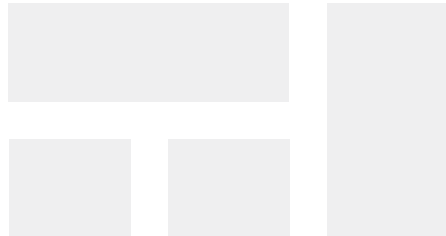## Research Projects

**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

November 2021

CCJHR

CCJHR Research Projects

1. *Subsidiary Protection: Case Law Project*, Siobhán Mullally, Liam Thornton *et al*, 2007

2. *CCTV as a Crime Prevention Strategy: A Review of the Literature*, Dorothy Appelbe, 2009

3. *Access to Justice for People with Disabilities as Victims of Crime in Ireland,* Claire Edwards, Gillian Harold & Shane Kilcommins, School of Applied Social Studies & CCJHR, February 2012

4. *Migrant Domestic Workers in the United Kingdom: Exclusions, Exemptions and Rights*, Siobhán Mullally & Cliodhna Murphy, April 2012

5. *Racism and Hate Crime in Ireland: Is the legislative and policy framework adequate?*, Conference Summary, Nasc & CCJHR, October 2013

6. *Beyond McMahon – the Future of Asylum Reception in Ireland*, Conference Summary, Nasc & CCJHR, June 2018

7. *Beyond McMahon: Reflections on the Future of Asylum Reception in Ireland*, Nasc & CCJHR, December 2018

8. *Compendium on the Post-2015 Global Agenda on Climate-Risk Governance*, Tommaso Natoli, May 2020

9. *Law and Policies that Protect the Most Vulnerable Against Climate-Related Disaster Risks: Findings and Lessons Learned from Pacific Island Countries*, Tommaso Natoli, May 2020

10. *Literature Review on Enhancing Integration of Disaster Risk and Climate Change Adaptation in Irish Emergency Planning*, Shannon Greene, Peter Medway, Dug Cubie & Martin Le Tissier, July 2020

11. *Addressing Specific Vulnerabilities Through Integrated Climate and Disaster Risk Governance: Lessons from the Philippines*, Tommaso Natoli, November 2020

12. *Integrating CCA and DRR Law and Policies Towards a Climate-Resilient Development: Lessons from the Commonwealth of Dominica*, Tommaso Natoli, March 2021

13. *Global Synthesis Report on Law and Policies for Climate Resilience*, Tommaso Natoli, July 2021

14. *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, November 2021

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.   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 paper 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 paper 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 paper we will endeavour to explore the many areas of Traveller life that impact upon their educational attainment.

Over half of the Travelling community 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). The Early Childhood Care and

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* This research paper was undertaken by Denise Baker and comprises part of her Master's Degree by Research in Early Years Education which was submitted to Munster Technological University (MTU). It was principally supervised by Dr. Judith Butler and Dr. Joe Moynihan. Denise teaches on the Early Years programmes in MTU and Portobello Institute. She also works as a Community Heath Development worker with the Travellers of North Cork (TNC).

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 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 5,199 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 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.

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 1,000 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 purpose hood 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 tin-smithing, for example the mending of tinware such as pots and pans, and knackering 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)

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 & 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 1st 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 Irish Human 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).

B.   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 that 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%.

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) suggest 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 2nd 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.

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 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).

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., 2*008).

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 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.
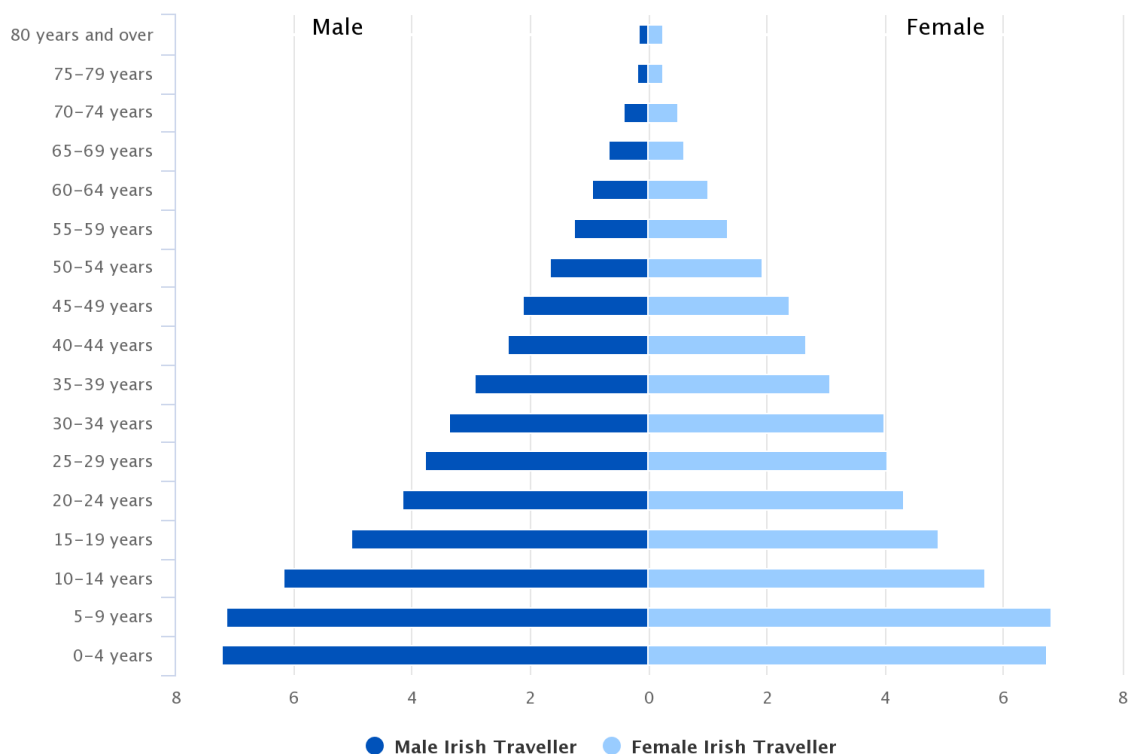
Figure 1: Irish Traveller by sex and age group, 2016 (CSO, 2017)

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 who 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 UK 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 wellbeing (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).

C. 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, and minority groups are more affected than, for example the suburbs. Irwin *et al.,* (2007) argues 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). Allport argued, that 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. 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 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.

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 & 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 humans are 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 ECCE 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.

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 and 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). Chamblis and Eglitis (2014), further summarise 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).

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). Dewer *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 an 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).[2]

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).

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[2] 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.

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.

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 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) 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 3rd 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 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.[3] 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

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[3] 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).

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 September 2011, along with the withdrawal of resource teachers for Travellers and the disbandment of the VTS. The decision to discontinue the Resource Teacher Service and Visiting Teacher Service, 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 children in preschool education since the introduction of the free preschool year in 2010 is sparse.[4]

D. 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 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 years care and education setting is subject to inspection from three 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

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[4] In personal correspondence with the ITM on April 12th 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.

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 obtaining 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 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 & Urban, 2012; DES, 2011; French, 2007; OECD, 2006).

Irish National Frameworks for Early Childhood Education

The 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 ECCE in Ireland. As such, it has relevance for the work of a wide range of early childhood care and education 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 ECCE 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). Review 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 ECCE should also be implemented as intended by NCCA (2009) as the curriculum framework for the first two 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, Gray and Ryan (2016) 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 & 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 UN 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 Síolta; 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; and provision of policy advice and representation on national and international ECCE policy development initiatives.

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.[5]

Anti-Bias Approach

Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards (2010) point out that anti-bias education also reflects the basic human rights included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the child (1989) 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; and 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 does not 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).

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 three 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

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[5] 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). 'èist' 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).

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 30th 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.

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 31st of December 2016. This does not apply to those who have signed a Grandfathering Declaration (on or before the 30th 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 Procedure's 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 three years after a review is carried out.

Information and Records

The following records must be stored for two years from the date a child last attends a service:
- Children's attendance records
- Records of administered medicines
- Accident and injury reports
- Staff rosters

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, eight 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, social development, 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 nine year follow-up report on their Early Start initiatives concluded 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 concerns the extent to which Early Start had benefits for children from ethnic minorities such as the Māori (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 Māori and non-Māori families. The findings of these comparisons showed the outcomes for

Māori and non-Māori 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).

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 & 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 ECCE 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.

The Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE Scheme) (DYCA, 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 acknowledgement 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 three 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 10th 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 10th, 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).

E.   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.

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 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 & 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 & 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. 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 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; UNESCO, 2017; Packer 2017; Ceka & Murati, 2016; Murray, 2012; Leventhal & 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 programme group that entered a high-quality preschool programme based on HighScope's participatory learning approach, and a comparison group who received no preschool programme. 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 Perry Preschool project found that adults at age 40 who underwent the preschool programme 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).
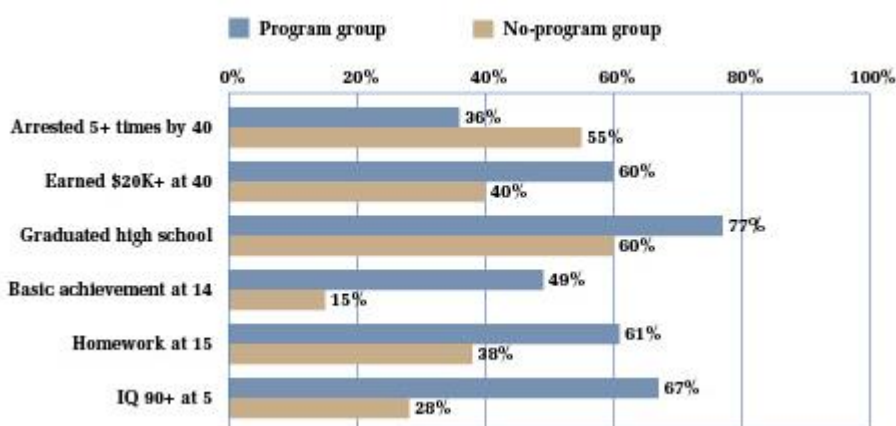

Figure 2: High Scope/Perry Preschool Study at 40 (HighScope Educational Research Foundation 2018)

Perceptions of Child Development

Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) explain that it was not until the 20th century that childhood was considered a unique and important stage in human life and it was then that childcare, protection, education and health were given attention in legal and policy domains. In the early part of the 20th 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 access 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 & 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).
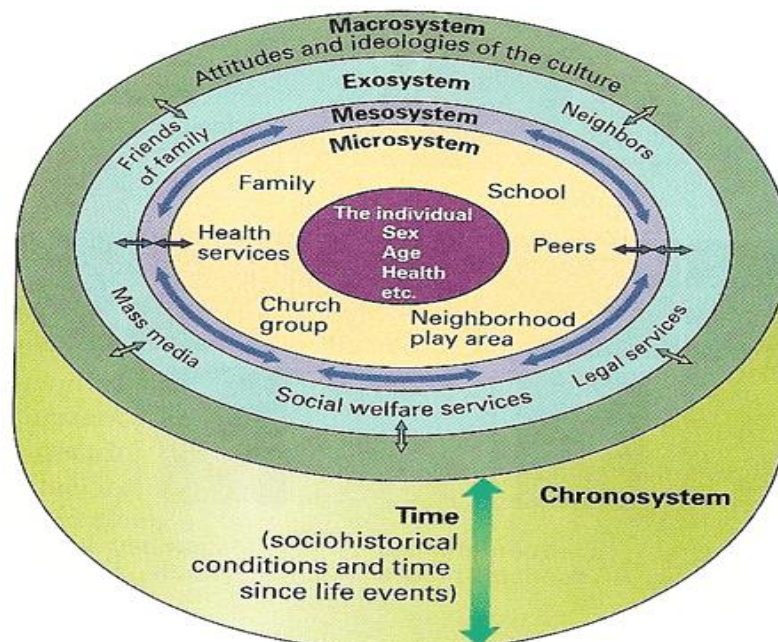

Figure 3: Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Theory (1979)

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed the Ecological Systems Theory (figure 3 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 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 Bio-ecological System Theory highlights children are significantly impacted by their immediate environment (which he calls a 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 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). 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 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 & 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) 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 criminalised childhood behaviour. 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 & Kienig, 2013). As the child is greatly influenced by the microsystem, the greater the educational attainment of that environment will positively affect the transitions from preschool to primary, primary to secondary, secondary to 3rd level, and this the DES (2014) in their Traveller Education Strategy Submission for Youthreach argues, 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 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 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).

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 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.

F.   CONCLUSION

This paper presents a discussion on the significant existing literature associated with early childhood care and education. 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 ethic minority group, Traveller children are at risk of adverse childhood experiences which have been shown to have lifelong negative consequences and outcomes.

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