To Explore the Influences on the
Pedagogical Approach of Early Years
Practitioners in Galway City and
County

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Arts
(Honours) in Early Years Care and Education

April 2017
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'I declare that this dissertation and the research involved in it are entirely the work of the author.'

________________________________________
Sinéad Chapman

___________________
Date
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Abstract

This research project explores the influences on the pedagogical approach of Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. It attempts to identify the personal attributes that influence pedagogical approach, explore how education and experience influence pedagogical approach and identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach.

The aims and objectives are proposed, relevant literature examined and the methodology introduced. A questionnaire is used as the instrument to gather data. Results are analysed and presented using a range of charts and graphs. A detailed discussion informs the reader of significant findings.
1. Introduction

The aim of this research project is to explore the influence on pedagogical approach of Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. It has three objectives, the first being to identify the personal attributes that influence pedagogical approach. The second to explore how education and experience influences pedagogical approach and thirdly to identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach.

For the purpose of this project, the term pedagogical approach includes pedagogy and pedagogical practice. The term Practitioner includes all those who work in the early year’s care and education sector with children from zero to six years old.

Chapter two of this research project will review relevant literature and provide a justification for the research provided. The methodology section will detail how data was gathered which will be then be presented in chapter four. Chapter five will discuss the results, highlighting the significant and important findings and relating them to research previously reviewed. The research project will conclude and a reference list and appendices provided at the end.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This review is an evaluation of literature on the influences on the pedagogical approach of Early Years Practitioners. Journal articles, reports and books published in Ireland and the United Kingdom are examined. The review will open with a definition of pedagogy, move to an understanding of pedagogy in early years care and education and will close with an exploration of influences on pedagogy. The review will conclude with a justification on the need for further research in this field.

2.2 Definitions of Pedagogy

Pedagogy can be defined as the practise or the art, science or craft of teaching; it refers to the interactive process between teacher, learner and the learning environment (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004). A more in-depth definition has been given by Hayes (2013), who says that pedagogy in early years care and education (EYCE) is reflected in the way practise is discussed and how framework principles are translated into practise every day. In a bid to capture its complexity, she describes pedagogy as a dynamic practise that is necessary to support children’s learning and development in a holistic way. Pedagogy for EYCE is a term that needs to incorporate the caring and educating aspects along with the values, principles, theories and approaches that guide and inform Practitioners in their daily practise.

2.3 Understanding Pedagogy

Studies have shown that Practitioners are reluctant to engage in discussions about their pedagogical practise. Moyles (2002) noted that Practitioners find it difficult to give a detailed description regarding what underpins their practise such as values, beliefs and principles.
A paper by French (2007) affirms that children absorb powerful messages from people and the environment regarding their identity, culture and social values. So in turn, how a pedagogy is formed is important to understand as it then has the potential to affect the child through their early learning and development.

Much research suggests that pedagogy for EYCE should facilitate play as a medium through which children learn. Hayes (2003) describes play as the pedagogical tool for the practitioner and a pathway for learning for the child. Play is considered fundamental and critical for how children learn (NCCA 2009). A study by Mc Innes et al (2011) investigates the differences in Practitioners beliefs about play and how they implement it in practise. It also highlights the complex issue of defining and understanding pedagogy in terms of Early Years Care and Education.

In order to understand pedagogy, Mc Innes (2011) uses a theory by Bernstein (1996) which involves two constructs, classification and framing. Classification refers to boundaries between subjects, when subjects are clearly defined it is strong and when subjects merge they are weak. Framing involves relationships between teacher and child and the degree of control between them, strong being when the control is with the teacher and weak is when the control is with the child. Pedagogy is described as visible when both constructs are strong and so an invisible pedagogy is when both are weak. McInnes reports that in Early Years settings, when emphasis is on child centeredness and play, pedagogy is invisible.

2.4 Influences on Pedagogy

A study by Moyles, Adams and Musgrove (2002) found that the area of pedagogy is complex and underpinned by principles which are acquired through training, professional experiences and personal understanding. They complied the research from a range of early year’s settings in England. It involved Practitioners viewing their practise on video and reflecting on it to delve into their perceptions of their role and its attributes. Researchers found that the Practitioners were more comfortable describing what they did rather than how or why they did it.
It identified that since the Early Years workforce is made up of variously trained, multi-professional people it is unlikely to have an overall defined concept of pedagogy. This is also true in an Irish context, in a survey of 531 Practitioners (Review of Education and Training Programmes in Early Years Settings, May 2016); there were six levels of qualifications ranging from the minimum requirement of Level 5 to a PhD Level. The qualifications specified were mainly in the early years care and education field but other areas were related to family studies, social studies and psychology. It is also important to note that Practitioners also work in a variety of settings that each come with their own ethos and mission.

A study undertaken by Brownlee and Berthelsen (2006), discusses the term epistemology and how practitioners beliefs about teaching and learning can inform or influence their pedagogy. The study showed that Practitioners with more sophisticated or relativistic beliefs were more democratic, empathetic, innovative and able to use more effected teaching strategies (Arrendondo & Rucinski, 1996). This research does provide an insight to how practitioner’s pedagogical approach is influenced however it is now quite dated.

A more recent study by White (2000) reported that Practitioners who had a dualism way of viewing the world, where the individual views knowledge as simple and certain, tended to have a simplistic view of problems that arose in their practise and solved them by drawing from past personal experiences. Practitioners who were identified by having more sophisticated epistemological beliefs were more likely to see complexity in problems and seek out alternative viewpoints from the child, family and school before deciding on action.

Brownlee et el (2006) reports that teachers who believe that their focus should be on children’s behaviour rather than their thinking saw learning as reproduction and transmission whereas teachers who see children as competent thinkers considers children’s learning as a process of interpretation and teaching as a constructivist undertaking.
The same study reinforced this Researchers thought that there had been very little investigation into how Practitioners practise and pedagogy can be influenced by their beliefs about teaching. It attempted to address this by exploring the nature of Practitioners beliefs and the relationship with practise. Video was used as a method for Practitioners to evaluate themselves focusing on their beliefs of teaching and to reflect on their practise.

This study found that Practitioners who held relativistic beliefs and who are reflective about their knowledge are more than likely to engage in constructivist practise and that they will look to develop active teaching and learning partnerships. Whereas, Practitioners who believe that knowledge is absolute and certain are less likely to seek out new learning or reflect on their current practise. This study confirms that the Practitioners educational experiences influence their pedagogy by impacting on personal epistemological beliefs and learning outcomes.

A paper by Stephen (2010) critically examines the influences on pedagogy and challenges the use of tacit knowledge in early years practise. This paper explores a number of pieces of research carried out in various settings across the UK. Videos, photographs and reflective dialogues are the methodology chosen in the research. Stephen (2010) also notes the problem with Practitioners having difficulty in articulating how they support children’s early learning and development and the lack of research in this area.

Stephen argues that the largely supported agreement of the importance of play and child-centred approaches in EYCE significantly influences how Practitioners think and carry out their practise. She also lists policy, curriculum, continuous professional development, personal beliefs and value systems of having an impact also.
A more recent and Irish perspective is given by Hayes (2013), using Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-ecological systems perspective (1998) illustrates how early years care and education pedagogy is impacted by many factors, recognising that individuals are affected by different systems and contexts.

Hayes (2013) acknowledges that Practitioners own history and experiences can influence their pedagogy and with it bring some truth and myth. She highlights the need of Practitioners to be willing to challenge and explore their own assumptions. Practitioners need to be aware of tacit knowledge, which can form an uncertain foundation for pedagogy, as Hayes (2013) notes pedagogy can become to be described as just the way things are.

In an attempt to understand pedagogy across cultures, Arnold and Brennan (2013) complied a study, which was based on two early years’ organisations in two countries, England and Ireland. Its aim was to gather information from both settings on their pedagogical perspectives and practises and to identify the similarities and differences. Two episodes from a day in each of the settings was filmed and each setting then viewed and gave critical reflections on their own and each other’s practises.

The discussions were then analysed to differentiate between the practises and to understand the thinking and values behind the approaches. The study’s specific aims were to identify possible issues, interests and conflicts in sharing practise and to create a critical reflection on the basis of their pedagogical practise. The researchers admit that they were reluctant to raise issues and to be critical of each other’s practise, which is a surprisingly personal approach to conducting a study.
When the data was compared and critiqued, unpinning theories to pedagogy where identified. It was found that the Irish Practitioners who all had their own children drew from personal experiences and beliefs. Whereas the Practitioners based in England relied on theory. This study raised important issues that pedagogy is an uncertain science and there is no blueprint.

This study proposes to explore the influences of pedagogy of early year’s practitioners in Galway City and County. This literature review has exposed a need to conduct further research. The research reviewed was found to be dated, with the most relevant to the topic being from 2002. Of all the research reviewed only one was aimed at Practitioners in Ireland. Some evidence lacked confidence in its findings. Other research focused more on defining effective pedagogy rather than the influences behind it.
3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will give a detailed account of how research will be collected. Section two will give the rationale behind the chosen research method. The procedure in carrying out the research is outlined in section three. The fourth section will discuss the participants and section five and six will cover the ethical considerations and the limitations. The final two sections will be a description of the proposed method of analysis and conclusion.

The aim of this research project is to explore the influences on the pedagogical approach of the Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. There are three objectives, with the first being to identify the personal attributes that influence your pedagogical approach. The second objective is to explore how education and experience influence pedagogical approach and thirdly to identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach.

3.2 Method

A quantitative research method involves collecting relatively large amounts of information. It is usually done by using a structured, predesigned questionnaire. The proposed information must be measurable, and definable. Punch (2005; 28) states “quantitative research collects numerical data and… (uses) typically structured and predetermined research question, conceptual frameworks and designs”.

A qualitative research method focuses on gathering high quality information. This type of research uses interviews and focus groups with thought out questions. The target information does not need to be as measurable and definitions are not as important. Punch (2005; p.23) explains that this method attempts to understand individuals perception of the world. It uses non-numerical and unstructured data. General research questions are used at the beginning and become more focused as the interview progresses.
After much deliberation, it was decided that this research project would use a quantitative method to collect the required data. The topic requires an in-depth knowledge into Practitioners thought formation and process and initially it seemed that the best method would be to conduct interviews. However, after a review of current research it is apparent that Early Years Practitioners typically do not feel comfortable explaining their pedagogical approach. Also as the target participants would be from Galway City and County, it would time restricting to collect the data needed. It was decided to use the quantitative method, as it would allow Practitioners time to reflect on their pedagogical approach.

3.3 Procedure

Using the objectives of the topic, a pilot questionnaire (appendix 2) was drawn up. It was given out to three people who made suggestions on how it could be improved. The suggestions involved adding space for Practitioners responses and changing the terminology of the response options. Recommendations were taken on board and changes were made.

The finalised questionnaire (appendix 3) was aligned so that the first three questions gathered general information on the respondents. Questions four and five were to satisfy objective one; to identify the personal attributes that influence your pedagogical approach. Questions six to thirteen referred to the second objective to explore how education and experience influence pedagogical approach. The final questions were to gather data to satisfy objective three, to identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach.

The finalised questionnaire will be distributed to Practitioners in Galway City and County by person and by email. A cover letter (appendix 1) will accompany each questionnaire. This will be done over a period of one week.
3.4 Participants

Twenty Early Years Practitioners working in services across Galway City and County will be the sample group to collect data from. It is a requirement of this research project to have a sample group of twenty participants.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were told of the research topic and advised that they could withdraw at any time they wished. All participants were informed that the data would be destroyed by the 31st July 2017. Signed consent was given by all respondents.

3.6 Limitations

As a requirement, this research project could only survey twenty people; consequently, the findings may not represent all of the Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. Steps were taken in the design of the questionnaire to reduce bias by formulating neutral questions. However, there is a possible issue of respondent’s honesty as the topic may generate Practitioner’s to feel as though it is a test to their knowledge.

3.7 Method of Analysis

The results of this quantitative research were analysed and used to find correlation between the variables. Results are presented in the form of graphs and charts in the results chapter of this research project.

3.8 Conclusion

The quantitative method used involved questionnaires completed by Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. Results have been compiled and presented in Chapter Four and discussed in Chapter Five of this research project.
4. Presentation of Results

4.1 Introduction

Twenty questionnaires were distributed over one week. The response rate was high all questionnaires were completed. It was effective in gathering data needed. Question one sought permission. Question two and three gathered information of gender and age. Questions four and five were to identify the personal attributes that influence’s pedagogical approach. Question six to thirteen explored how education and experience can influence pedagogy. The final questions were to identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach.

All of the respondents gave permission. Nearly all were female (95%), over half were aged 25 – 40 (55%) and only 5% were over sixty years of age. A small group, 10%, were in the 18-25 bracket and the remainder (30%) were aged 40 to 60.
4.2 The Personal Attributes that Influence Early Years Practitioners Pedagogical Approach

Question four asked what personal attributes they considered to influence their approach. High numbers, 85% and 75%, regard values and beliefs and motivation to be influencing attributes. No respondents considered race to be an influence and two people specified others as “experience throughout life” and “my age – I am from a very different generation”. The graph below illustrates the answers.

Figure 4.2.1: Personal Attributes that Influence Pedagogical Approach
Question five asked participants to rate which theorist, approach or curriculum framework has had the most influence. Participants rated the most influential being Aistear with over half (55%) giving it a rating of one. Only one respondent specified other as “GIRFEC – getting it right for every child”. The responses are displayed in a table below.

Figure: 4.2.2: Theorist, Approach or Curriculum Framework that influence Pedagogical Approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorist/Approach/Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating 1 = most influential</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria Montessori</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggio Emilia</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Piaget</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Whariki</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 How Education and Experience Influences Early Years Pedagogical Approach

The sixth question asks participants to select how long they have worked in the EYCE sector, 5% selected 2 to 5 years, 15% say less than two years, 25% for 10 to 20 years and 35% for 5 to 10 years.

For question seven, participants selected a job title that most suits them, 20% are variations of Leaders in preschool and ECCE rooms and another 20% selected manager. Under a quarter (20%) of the group stated, their title was manager with another role. The table below illustrates the combination of responses.

Figure 4.3.1: Job Title or Position in Early Years Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title/ Position</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Room Leader in Preschool/Playschool/ECCE Room</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Leader in Other: Montessori</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Leader in Preschool and Deputy Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Leader in Preschool and Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Leader in Preschool and Manager and Other: Owner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Leader in Other: Montessori and Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Assistant in Preschool</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Assistant in unspecified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room Assistant in Baby Room</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare Worker with 2-3 year olds</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 8 asked participants about their current qualification. The majority (35%) hold a Level 7 Award, 30% Level 6 QQI Award and 10% are at the Level 5 stage, all in the field of Early Years. Only 15% have a qualification to Level 8 and 5% have a Diploma in Montessori Education.

Questions 9, 10 and 11 asked what extent of agreement that their pedagogical approach was influenced by their work experiences, formal education and continuous development. The responses are illustrated below.

Figure 4.3.2: Pedagogical Approach Influenced by Work Experience, Formal Education and Continuous Professional Development
Question twelve required participants to select how often they reflect on their own pedagogical approach. Nearly all (95%) say they do reflect on their pedagogical approach. The results are shown below.

Figure 4.3.3: Frequency of Reflection on Pedagogical Approach
Question thirteen requires participants to rate a statement on how true they believe it to be, one being least and five being most. The responses are illustrated below.

Figure 4.3.4: Response to Critical Reflection being an Important Tool in Exploring the Influences on Pedagogical Approach
4.4 How the Environment Impacts Early Years Practitioners Pedagogical Approach.

Question fourteen requires details of the type service they are currently working in. The most common type is preschool (16%) and over half (55%) are employed in private services. The answers are shown in the chart below.

Figure 4.4.1: Type of Service

Question fifteen requires details of the adult to child ratio, which the participants work under. The majority (35%) said 1:11, 20% at 1:10 and another 20% work at a 1:8 ratio. The smallest group (10%) work at 1:7 and 15% have a 1:9 ratio.
When asked if their pedagogical approach was influenced by the type of service they worked in 85% said yes. Question 17 required participants to select where their service was based, half-selected Galway City, 30% Galway County rural and 20% in Galway County urban. In question 18, when asked if they thought the location of the service had an influence, just over half (55%) thought it did.

Question 19, gave specific practises relating to their service, they were asked to select all that apply. Below is an illustration of the responses.

Figure 4.4.2: Specific Practise Influences on Pedagogical Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Practise</th>
<th>No. of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow time for Practitioners to critically reflect on their pedagogy.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage Practitioners to take part in continuous professional development.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge assumptions and tacit knowledge.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote an environment that is open to discussion and change in terms of practise, beliefs, understanding and attitudes.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support pedagogy that celebrates and welcomes differences.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final question asks the participants to rate aspects of their service from one to ten on how they impact their pedagogical approach (one having most impact and ten having the least). One respondent specified other as “parent’s expectations”. The ratings are displayed below.

Figure 4.4.3: Aspects of Service Influencing Pedagogical Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Service</th>
<th>Rating 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the significance of the findings. The objectives of this research will form the headings under which the discussion will take place. To highlight the significance of the findings, the results of the research are related to the findings of others discussed in the literature review in chapter two.

5.2 Objective 1: To identify the personal attributes that influence pedagogical approach

According to the findings, nearly all personal attributes were found to influence pedagogical approach. Race was not selected even though religion, culture and nationality were. The findings are similar to the study by Stephen (2010) who found personal beliefs and value systems to have an impact on pedagogical approach. Where this study was very informative into the many influences of pedagogical approach, it did not give any reason behind it.

This also corresponds with the study by Arnold and Brennan (2013) who found that Practitioners in Ireland drew from personal experiences and beliefs. The same study also found that Practitioners based in England tended to use pedagogy based on theory. This could indicate a need for further study into what makes a pedagogical approach effective or of high quality.

The majority of participants for this research were female (95%) and unexpectedly a very small number indicated that gender was an influence. This is may be because the majority of the Practitioners have not had experienced working in an early years environment with a male Practitioner due to the Early Years workforce in Ireland being mainly female (Review of Education and Training Programmes in Early Years, May 2016). For future research, comparisons could be made on the practise of Practitioners in services with just a female workforce and services with male Practitioners.
Aistear was the most influential in terms of theory, approach and curriculum framework, which was only to be expected because it is the National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for early years care and education in Ireland and services are contracted to follow it through the Free Preschool Year Scheme. This finding could indicate that Practitioners have accepted Aistear as the National Curriculum Framework after an unsteady introduction.

Aistear is a curriculum that is play based, child centred and built around the child, incorporating their family and community. This can also signifies that Practitioners are aware that their pedagogy facilitates play, which Hayes (2003) highlighted as an important tool in which children learn play as a medium through which children learn.

It is interesting to note that Maria Montessori was not rated more influential than Reggio Emilia and Vygotsky considering its previous monopoly on providing a curriculum for early years care and education in Ireland (French 2007). This could be due to a small percentage of the group having a Montessori background.

5.3 Objective 2: To explore how education and experience influence pedagogical approach

It is evident from the findings that Practitioner’s pedagogical approaches are influenced by their professional experiences, formal education and professional development. There was a relatively high number in agreement, which supports the study by Moyles, Adams and Musgrove (2002). The question of formal education influencing pedagogical approach had the least agreement even though by a small minority.

It is important to note there is a possible connection between a large percentage (50%) of Participants having a higher level of education, Level 7 and 8, and the large agreement that reflection is critical to how their pedagogical approach is influenced. This was also evident in the 2016 Survey of Early Years Practitioners, where those with a higher qualification felt confident in reflecting on their practise and did so frequently.
5.4 Objective 3: To identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach

Hayes (2013) highlighted the need to challenge tacit knowledge, the findings from this study show that only half of the services do this in practise. From the literature review, the importance of reflection has been acknowledged and needed to provide an effective pedagogy; findings show that only 50% of services allow time for their Practitioner do to this. This seems to contradict the finding that the majority of the Practitioners have said they regularly reflect on their practise. This may mean they reflect on their practise outside of the time they are with the children. Which may be caused by time constraints and high adult to child ratios, which some Practitioners rated as having a high impact on their pedagogical approach.

In terms of location of service influencing pedagogical approach it was quite a balanced census, in that 55% thought it did. Interestingly, those who thought it did have an influence gave a reason for their answer. Those who did not think it had an influence did not specify why. The reason most specified was because the services were rural based and had access to more natural, large, open spaces and farms.

The final question asked participants to rate aspects of the early years services in how influential they were on their pedagogical approach, a common variable could not be found. However, it was noted that those who were managers rated management as least influential and those who were leaders or assistants rated management as most influential.

Overall, the findings provided an overview of what can influence pedagogy. The findings did not identify any particular personal attribute, experience, theory or environment type. Like its definition, it is a very complex aspect of the early year’s care and education field. This corresponds with the points raised by Arnold and Brennan (2013) in their study who describe pedagogy as being an uncertain science.
5.5 Evaluation of Method

The data-gathering instrument, the questionnaire, did collect the relevant information to satisfy the objectives. The response rate was high and each questionnaire was returned completed. The questionnaire was effective for the most part but some questions, which asked for explanations, were not completed. However, this did not affect the data gathering process or the validity of the results. The quality of the information was still intact.

5.6 Conclusion

Data from twenty questionnaires, completed by Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County, were analysed and presented in the Results Chapter of this research project. The findings were then discussed to highlight what was significant and important in terms of the research projects objectives, to identify the personal attributes that influence pedagogical approach, to explore how education and experience influences pedagogical approach and to identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach.

The findings were discussed and compared with research that was reviewed in the literature review. It was identified that Early Years Practitioner’s pedagogical approaches were identified by some personal attributes, their education and professional experiences and by the environment. The results highlighted the importance of reflection in practise to form and review pedagogical approaches to challenge assumption and tacit knowledge.
6. Conclusion

This research project’s aim was to explore the influences on the pedagogical approach of Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. It has used current research to form a literature review, which defined and gave an understanding of pedagogical approach in the field of early year’s care and education. The research reviewed gave an insight to previous studies on the influences of Practitioners pedagogical approach.

A quantitative method of research was carried out; using the tool of questionnaire, where twenty Early Years Practitioners from Galway City and County gave their thoughts about how their pedagogical approach was influenced. The data was then analysed and presented using a variety of graphs, charts and tables. The results were used to form a discussion on the most significant and important findings relating to the objectives of the project. Research previously reviewed was used to compare and validate findings.

It is apparent from the findings and research that most personal attributes, professional experiences, formal education and the early year’s environment all have some degree of influence on the pedagogical approach of Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. The practise of critical reflection plays a key role to how Practitioners evaluate the impact those influences have on their pedagogical approach in a positive or negative effect.


Appendices

Appendix 1: Covering letter issued to all participants.

31st January 2017

Dear ____________________,

I am a fourth year student at Athlone Institute of Technology completing a Level 8 Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Years Care and Education. As part of my course, I am required to complete a research project.

I have chosen to explore the influences on pedagogical approach of Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. I will use the tool of questionnaires to gather the data needed. I would be grateful if you could participate.

The information you give will only be used for the purpose of this project and will be disposed of accordingly when finished with. Confidentiality and anonymity will be observed at all times.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance.

Kind regards,

Sinead Chapman
Appendix 2: Pilot Questionnaire

Title: To Explore the Influences on the Pedagogical Approach of Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County.

Q1. I give my permission for this questionnaire to be used as part of a research project by a Fourth-Year student of Athlone Institute of Technology.

Yes ☐  No ☐

Q1. Please indicate your gender:

Male ☐  Female ☐  Other ☐

Q2. What age bracket are you in:

18-25 ☐  25-40 ☐  40-60 ☐  60+ ☐

Objective 1: To identify the personal attributes that influence your pedagogical approach.

Q3. In terms of personal attributes, which of the following do you consider to influence your pedagogical approach? Please tick all that apply.

Your own:

Childhood experiences ☐  Gender ☐  Talents ☐
Religion ☐  Attitude ☐  Inabilities ☐
Race ☐  Values and Beliefs ☐  Motivation ☐
Culture ☐  Personality ☐  None ☐
Nationality ☐  Preferences ☐  Other ☐

If other, please specify:

__________________________________________________________________________
Q4. Which theorist, approach or curriculum framework has had the most influence on your pedagogical approach? Please rate from one to eight, one being most influential eight being least.

- Maria Montessori
- Reggio Emilia
- Piaget
- Te Whariki
- Vygotsky
- High Scope
- Aistear
- Other

If other, please state:

_________________________________________________________________________________

Objective 2: To explore how education and experience influence pedagogical approach.

Q5. How many years have you been working in the Early Years Care and Education sector?

- 0-2 □
- 2-5 □
- 5-10 □
- 10-20 □
- 20+ □

Q6. Please select a job title/position that most suits you, it may be more than one.

Room Leader (please specify which room) □

Room Assistant (please specify which room) □

Childcare Worker (please specify what age group) □

Manager □

Deputy Manager □

Other (please specify) □

Q7. What is the level and title of education do you currently hold?

_________________________________________________________________________________

Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your pedagogical approach has been influenced by your work experiences?

Strongly agree □
Agree □
Neutral □
Disagree □
Strongly disagree □

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your pedagogical approach has been influenced by your formal education?

Strongly agree □
Agree □
Neutral □
Disagree □
Strongly disagree □
Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your pedagogical approach has been influenced by continuous professional development?

Strongly agree □  Agree □  Neutral □  Disagree □  Strongly disagree □

Q11. How often do you reflect on your own pedagogical approach?

Never □  Rarely □  Sometimes □  Often □  Very often □

Q12. Critical reflection is an important tool in exploring the influences on your pedagogy. On a scale of one to five (one being least and five being most), how true do you find this statement.

1 (least)  2  3  4  5 (most)

Objective 3: To identify how the environment impacts pedagogical approach.

Q13. In your current employment, what type of Service is it?

Please tick all that apply.

Private □  Community □  Full Day Preschool □  Sessional Preschool □

Sessional and Part-time Preschool □  Preschool and afterschool □

Multi service and multi age (Crèche) □  Other (please specify): _______________

Q14. What is the ratio of staff to children in the room you currently work?

__________________________________________________________________________________

Q15. Do you think the type of service you work in influences your pedagogical approach?

Yes □  No □

Please give a reason for your answer
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Q16. Are you based:

Galway City  

Galway County Urban  

Galway County Rural  

Q17. Do you think the location of your service has influenced your pedagogical approach?

Yes  

No  

Please give a reason for your answer

__________________________________________________________________________________  

__________________________________________________________________________________  

__________________________________________________________________________________  

__________________________________________________________________________________  

Q18. Does the service you work in (please tick all that apply):

Allow time for Practitioners to critically reflect on their pedagogy  

Encourage Practitioners to take part in continuous professional development.  

Challenge assumptions and tacit knowledge  

Promote an environment that is open to discussion and change in terms of practise, beliefs, understanding and attitudes.  

Support pedagogy that celebrates and welcomes differences.  

Q19. Please rate the following from 1 – 10 in how you think they impact your pedagogy. (1 having the most impact and 10 having the least impact).

___Funding  

___Regulations and Frameworks  

___Resources  

___Space  

___Time  

___Adult to child ratios  

___Insufficient non-contact time  

___Other Practitioners  

___Management  

___Other (please specify): _______
Appendix 3: Final Questionnaire

Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore the Influences on the Pedagogical Approach of Early Years Practitioners in Galway City and County. Pedagogy is the practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching, it is the interactive process that takes place between the Practitioner and the child to enable learning and development to take place.

Please attempt to answer all of the questions. All information provided will be treated in strictest confidence and only used for the stated purpose.

Q1. I give my permission for this questionnaire to be used as part of a research project by a Fourth-Year student of Athlone Institute of Technology.

Yes         No

Q2. Please indicate your gender:

Male          Female          Other

Q3. What age bracket are you in:

18-25          25-40          40-60          60+

Q4. In terms of personal attributes, which of the following do you consider to influence your pedagogical approach? Please tick all that apply.

Your own:

- Childhood experiences
- Religion
- Race
- Culture
- Nationality
- Gender
- Attitude
- Values and Beliefs
- Personality
- Preferences
- Talents
- Inabilities
- Motivation
- None
- Other

If other, please specify:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Q5. Which theorist, approach or curriculum framework has had the most influence on your pedagogical approach? Please rate from one to eight, one being most influential eight being least.

- Maria Montessori
- Reggio Emilia
- Piaget
- Te Whariki
- Vygotsky
- High Scope
- Aistear
- Other

If other, please state:

_________________________________________________________________________________

Q6. How many years have you been working in the Early Years Care and Education sector?

0-2  2-5  5-10  10-20  20+

Q7. Please select a job title/position that most suits you, it may be more than one.

Room Leader (please specify which room)
Room Assistant (please specify which room)
Childcare Worker (please specify what age group)
Manager
Deputy Manager
Other (please specify)

Q8. What is the level and title of education that you currently hold?

__________________________________________________________________________________

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your pedagogical approach has been influenced by your work experiences?

Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your pedagogical approach has been influenced by your formal education?

Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree
Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your pedagogical approach has been influenced by continuous professional development?

Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

Q12. How often do you reflect on your own pedagogical approach?

Never □   Rarely □   Sometimes □   Often □   Very often □

Q13. Critical reflection is an important tool in exploring the influences on your pedagogy. On a scale of one to five (one being least and five being most), how true do you find this statement.

1 (least) 2 3 4 5 (most)

Q14. In your current employment, what type of Service is it? Please tick all that apply.

Private □   Community □   Full Day Preschool □   Sessional Preschool □
Sessional and Part-time Preschool □   Preschool and afterschool □
Multi service and multi age (Crèche) □   Other (please specify): _______________

Q15. What is the ratio of staff to children in the room you currently work?

__________________________________________________________________________________

Q16. Do you think the type of service you work in influences your pedagogical approach?

Yes □   No □
Please give a reason for your answer

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Q17. Are you based:

Galway City □
Galway County Urban □
Galway County Rural □
Q18. Do you think the location of your service has influenced your pedagogical approach?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please give a reason for your answer

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Q19. Does the service you work in (please tick all that apply):

Allow time for Practitioners to critically reflect on their pedagogy ☐

Encourage Practitioners to take part in continuous professional development. ☐

Challenge assumptions and tacit knowledge ☐

Promote an environment that is open to discussion and change in terms of practise, beliefs, understanding and attitudes. ☐

Support pedagogy that celebrates and welcomes differences. ☐

Q20. Please rate the following from 1 – 10 in how you think they impact your pedagogy. (1 having the most impact and 10 having the least impact).

☐ Funding
☐ Regulations and Frameworks
☐ Resources
☐ Space
☐ Time
☐ Adult to child ratios

☐ Insufficient non-contact time
☐ Other Practitioners
☐ Management
☐ Other (please specify): ______________________

This questionnaire is now complete. Thank you for your participation.