Developing Early Years Professionalism: Evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative’s Professional Development Programme in Community Childcare Centres in the Dublin Docklands

Abstract
From 2007 to 2010, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at the National College of Ireland (NCI) supported 24 early years practitioners from 11 community childcare centres located in Dublin’s Docklands to undertake training in Pen Green’s methodology to develop partnerships with parents to support their child’s learning—Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning (PICL). This report describes an evaluation of the implementation of the PICL framework in a sample of five of these childcare centres. Specifically the evaluation sought to identify and analyse:

• What does parental involvement mean in childcare settings where staff have undergone PICL training?
• How have these childcare centres implemented the PICL training?
• To what extent has awareness been raised amongst childcare practitioners about parental involvement in children’s learning?
• How do parents who use the centres regard parental involvement in the childcare centres?
• Which elements of the PICL training worked best, and for which groups?
• What are the barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in the early years settings; and
• Are any future training and resources required to encourage parental involvement in the childcare centres?

This report also discusses the sustainability of the use of the Pen Green approach in the Docklands childcare centres and the future role of the ELI in supporting continuous professional development (CPD) and parental involvement. While this report evaluates PICL implementation in the childcare settings, it must be considered within the context of the ELI’s wider childcare CPD programme that includes other training opportunities and workshop activities to support better ECCE practice and parental involvement in early learning in the Docklands area. To decontextualise PICL and exclude the ELI’s training in national quality and curriculum frameworks and its play-based activities that encourage parents and practitioners to engage with children would give an incomplete picture of the influences on practice and parental involvement. Indeed, the wider influence of the ELI’s training and activities arose organically during data collection. Therefore, reference is made in the report, when appropriate, to ELI activities that support parental involvement in Docklands early years settings through disseminating and supporting the implementation of national policy frameworks alongside their own initiatives with parents and children.

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