



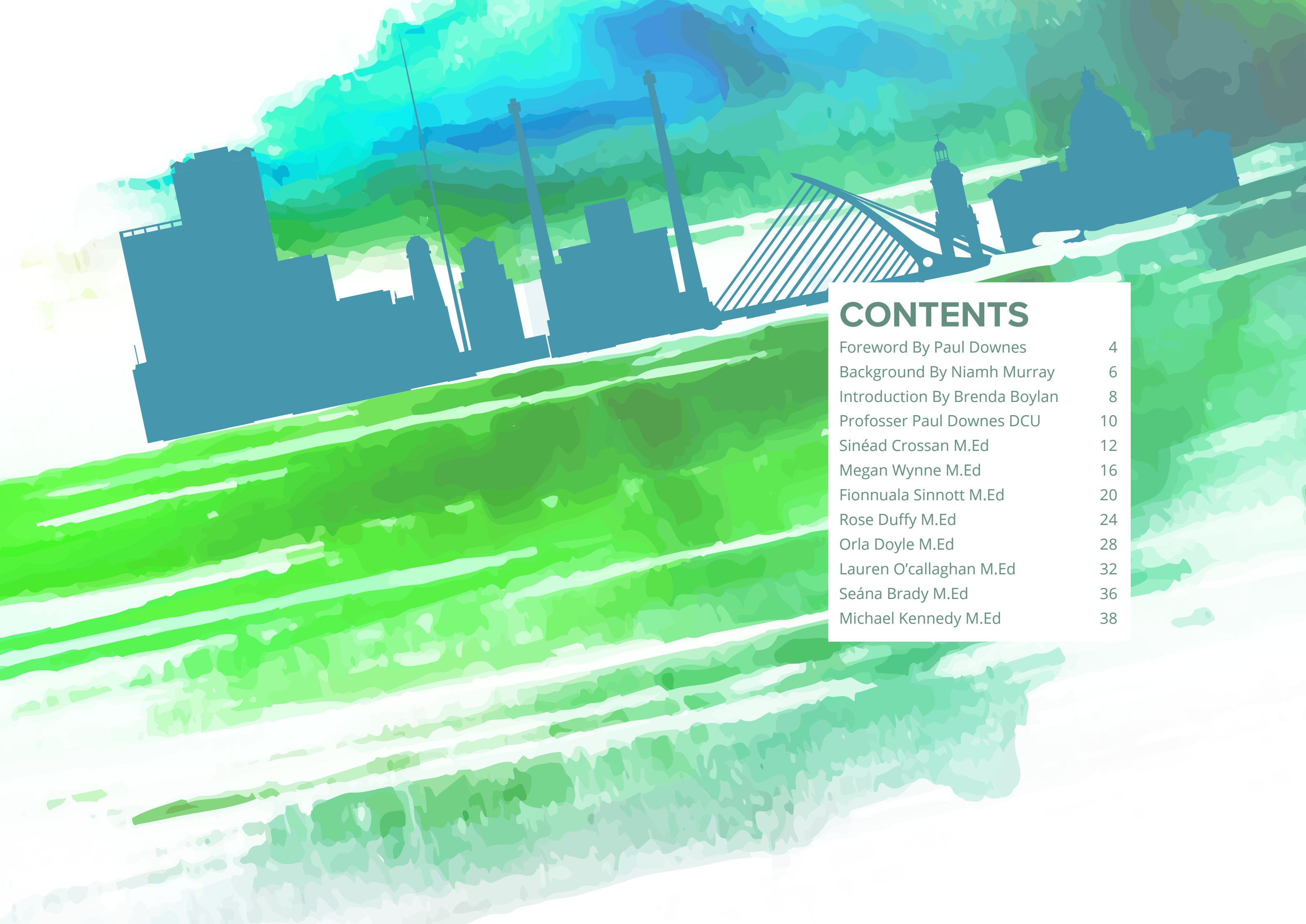
DUBLIN  
**NORTH EAST  
INNER CITY**



## **COMMON THREADS:**

**Research Findings and Recommendations  
from NEIC Masters Fellowship Programme**





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# FOREWORD

BY PAUL DOWNES

Professor of Psychology  
of Education DCU

We would like to congratulate the North East Inner City (NEIC) Masters Fellowship graduates teaching in our local DEIS schools on the significant achievement of not only completing the Masters with such impressive work to such a high standard, but also on doing so while in the midst of a global pandemic. To have managed to balance the crisis situation in schools and society with the ability to gather data for their studies is hugely impressive. This document is a testament to the vitality of their work.



The themes of their theses run across many dimensions. To pick up on some common threads, there is a clear emphasis on voices and experiences of the children themselves in school, as well as on children's social-emotional, mental health and wellbeing needs. These messages need to be heard loud and clear by policy makers. Another emerging theme is that of the importance of spaces in schools and the local community area, both physical and relational spaces. It is hoped that a strong focus on such spaces can inform the new National Children's Policy Framework.

The Special Option in Poverty and Social Inclusion in Education run as part of DCU Institute of Education's M.Ed seeks to combine an interdisciplinary approach to strong conceptual understandings of this area with a policy and practice relevant focus. It is one that keeps a strong emphasis on community dimensions to engagement.

It is to be noted that this group of NEIC fellowship students were part of the DCU Institute of Education's Educational Disadvantage Centre's invited submission to the Joint Oireachtas Education Committee on the impact of the Covid pandemic.

To view this submission visit here.

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_education\\_further\\_and\\_higher\\_education\\_research\\_innovation\\_and\\_science/submissions/2020/2020-12-17\\_opening-statement-dr-paul-downes-director-educational-disadvantage-centre-institute-of-education-dublin-city-university\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_education_further_and_higher_education_research_innovation_and_science/submissions/2020/2020-12-17_opening-statement-dr-paul-downes-director-educational-disadvantage-centre-institute-of-education-dublin-city-university_en.pdf)

Some of the key issues here such as specialist emotional counsellors/therapists in school have already had impact on national policy. It is to be hoped that this group of teachers as NEIC Fellowship recipients will contribute not only to teaching in DEIS schools in the future but also towards national advocacy as leaders in this area.

DCU's Educational Disadvantage Centre looks forward very much to our continued engagement with the NEIC .

Yours Sincerely,

Professor Paul Downes,  
Professor of Psychology of Education,  
Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre  
Institute of Education,  
Dublin City University







## BACKGROUND

BY NIAMH MURRAY  
Principal Rutland NS.

What is your understanding of educational disadvantage? is a standard question to ask at an interview, yet, quite often, the new teacher is ill equipped to answer. Whilst the principal's representative on NEIC Subgroup 3, I encountered a myriad of funding proposals being put forward for review, which varied widely in value. Cognisant that many teachers lack the background theory to help them understand the socio economic context they are working in, I thought it would be an idea to further develop their knowledge and increase their understanding by proposing a place for a teacher in each of the NEIC schools on the Masters in Education, Special Option Poverty & Social Inclusion, which was offered by the Educational Disadvantage Centre in DCU.



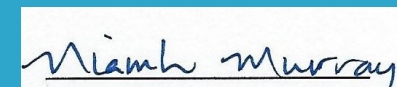
Offering a postgraduate course would incentivise teachers to remain working longer in the NEIC, thus boosting staff retention levels whilst offering teachers an additional educational qualification. Postgraduate study whilst working in the field is arguably the most authentic form of study, experiential knowledge meets theoretical knowledge with each challenging the other in a manner which stretches the student.

I approached Professor Paul Downes, Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre in DCU to see if he would be in favour of supporting. Paul was fully on board and so the proposal was submitted. Paul suggested naming the initiative the NEIC Fellowships in recognition of both the inspiration for and the purpose of the course.

I have seen the benefits of our own NEIC Principal's Network in nurturing co-operation and shared learning across the schools, most notably in the establishment of Nurture Rooms in the NEIC schools. I recognised that bringing together a cross section of teachers working in the field would create a space for them to share ideas and practice which would engage and energise them, whilst enhancing their relationships with children, parents and teachers, ultimately benefiting the children's classroom learning.

The alliances created amongst this group of teachers have greatly benefited the children, whilst serving to remind the teachers of their capacity to make a difference. An advocacy group was born of the students who campaigned for the reopening of the Sean McDermott St Pool. They lobbied for the introduction of counselling in primary schools by making a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education which was subsequently agreed to by the Minister for Education Norma Foley. The M.Ed. research feedback seminars delivered by the teachers in late Spring to a cross section of statutory, government, community and voluntary sector stakeholders in the NEIC were thought provoking and engaging and are outlined in more detail in this publication.

The future looks brighter in the north east inner city. The NEIC Multi Disciplinary Team, a radical collaboration between the Department of Education & the HSE, was established in response to the Principals' requests after the feud and is now an embedded structure supporting children according to their levels of need. City Connects is providing extra opportunities to all children and linking them in with services in the community. In terms of next steps, we need to ensure that other schools benefit from initiatives the NEIC schools have been fortunate to be supported with funding to provide a Multi-Disciplinary Team, the development of Nurture Rooms and the implementation of the City Connects Project. The development of a DEIS Plus status within the current DEIS school structure would ensure that these services are rolled out to those children who need them most.



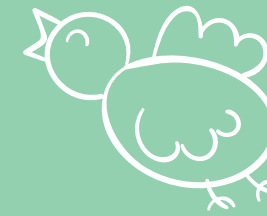
Niamh Murray  
Principal, Rutland N.S.



# INTRODUCTION

BY BRENDA BOYLAN  
Chairperson, North East Inner City  
Subgroup 2 – Maximising  
Educational, Training and  
Employment Opportunities

The North East Inner City (NEIC) Initiative greatly welcomed the opportunity to work with the schools in the area and with DCU, in support of this innovative NEIC Masters Fellowship Programme.



Offering a Masters in Education (Poverty and Social Inclusion) for a teacher in each of the NEIC primary schools was proposed by local school principals as a practical way to support staff retention and to develop teachers' understanding of educational disadvantage, to the benefit of their students.

Providing NEIC funding for this Programme was a way of investing in one of the Initiative's core objectives to maximise educational, training and employment opportunities in Dublin's North East Inner City.

Each of the successful participants on the programme is to be congratulated on successfully completing their studies and applying their knowledge through their teaching in the NEIC. They managed to do this while also navigating the challenges of teaching and studying during a pandemic, this is further evidence of their commitment as educators.

That commitment was clearly shown in the graduates' presentation of their research findings to members of the NEIC Subgroup 2 and local community stakeholders earlier this year. The wide variety of research topics has provided a wealth of material and insight into the experience and challenges of teachers, learners and parents on the ground in the NEIC.

It is great to see the findings and recommendations from this research now collated into one document. This will provide an important input into the work of the NEIC Subgroup 2 and help inform the future strategic direction of the Initiative.

There is no doubt that the NEIC Fellowship Programme will have a positive and lasting impact on schools, students and teachers in the NEIC and congratulations are due to all who worked to ensure its success.

Brenda Boylan

Department of the Taoiseach  
Chair of NEIC Subgroup 2





## THREE KEY HEADLINE PRIORITY ISSUES

By Paul Downes  
Professor of Psychology of Education  
DCU

### **1 The need for specialist emotional counsellors/therapists in schools to provide 1 to 1 supports for pupils experiencing trauma and/or adverse childhood experiences, at both primary and secondary school level.**

Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) manifest themselves in many different forms, such as any of the following experiences:

- Domestic violence,
- Substance abuse in family,
- Neglect,
- Mental illness in family,
- Loss of parent through divorce, death or abandonment,
- Abuse,
- Incarcerated family member,
- Consistent Poverty,
- Experience of suicide,
- Childhood homelessness,
- Bullying in School, Placed in State Care.

### **2 Cityconnects needs to incorporate a range of such specialist emotional counsellors/therapists based in 1-2 schools per therapist.**

These therapists could form part of a team while being based in specific schools rather than rotated.(building on Megan Wynne's thesis in particular on bereavement and related traumas).

Promoting and seeking funding for school gardens in all Norther East Inner-City Schools, with a view to promoting students' voices and leadership roles in these gardens, as part of their social and emotional development. This can include also growing vegetables and be seen also as a dimension to help motivate students' engagement and attendance at school, (building on Seana Brady's thesis in particular on school garden's impact on social and emotional development and Orla Doyle's thesis on children's subjective perception of meaningful local spaces).

### **3 Developing a NEIC local community outreach hub in conjunction with Trinity College Dublin to promote access to university and specific courses in particular (such as law, education, social work, psychology, politics etc), building on successful examples of such local community outreach hubs established by DCU's Educational Disadvantage Centre in conjunction with Northside Area Partnership and Dublin North West Partnership.**

A neutral location is needed for such an outreach hub such as the North Strand, to engage students from Summerhill, Sean McDermott St and Sheriff St. This is part of an initiative to build local community leaders across diverse professions from the local area. We met with TCD's Registrar to develop this on May 10th, following on from our earlier meeting with Trinity Access Project and Associate Dean for Engagement together with DCU Educational Disadvantage Centre Director (building on Lauren O'Callaghan's thesis on children's perception of teaching as a future career).





## **A RECONSTRUCTION OF LUNDY'S MODEL OF PARTICIPATION (2007), TO EXPLORE CHILDREN'S PERCEIVED IMPACT OF MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN THEIR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY THROUGH AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROJECT IN A DEIS BAND 1 PRIMARY SCHOOL**

By Sinéad Crossan M.Ed  
Central Model Senior School



**I knew that this  
was genuine, we  
were actually  
going to speak  
and get our  
voices heard.**



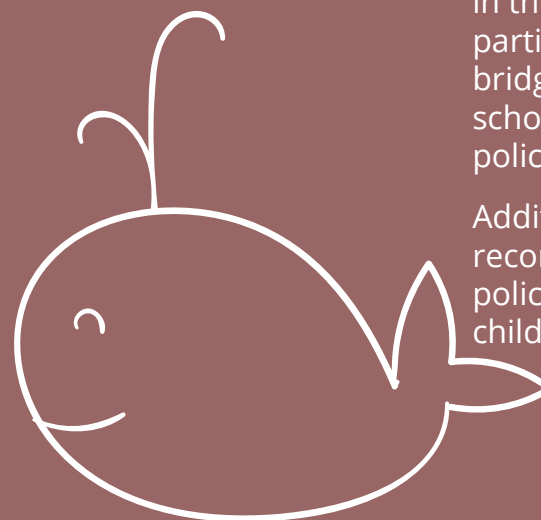
This action research study investigated the self-reported impact of active participation in school and the local community from a 6th class child's perspective of attending a DEIS Band 1 primary school in a socio-economically marginalised area of Dublin city.

The researcher established an after-school project designed to promote children as active citizens in their school and local community. Twenty children attended the group and 13 reflected on their experiences during the semi-structured interviews. As Lundy's Model of Participation (2007) has been heavily endorsed by government and community services as an effective framework to promote children's participation (Youth Work Ireland, 2015; Barnardos, 2021; DCYA, 2015), the researcher examined its suitability for this study and identified multiple gaps and oversights in the approach. Thus, an amplified, multidimensional methodology to facilitate children's active participation was designed for this investigation.

In addition to interviews, multiple methods of data collection were used in this qualitative enquiry including, elicitation methods such as drawings and photographs to represent the children's visual voices and the researcher's reflective journal. The results reveal a correlation between meaningful participation and wellbeing as the children reflected on how the experience influenced their enjoyment of school, and their social, emotional development. The findings also illustrate meaningful participation as a pathway to challenge traditional hierarchical relations between student and teacher.

Through their reflections, the children identified features of topical geography as effective methodologies which supported their meaningful participation. Community engagement and the influence of physical and relational space were key components to the multidimensional framework developed for this study and the findings indicate the importance of space on children's learning experience and the significance of recognising children as active citizens in their community. Correlations found between meaningful participation and wellbeing indicate the significance of bridging health and education outcomes and to recognise schools as a co-location to support these needs at national policy level.

Additionally, the discoveries demonstrate the need to reconceptualise children's participation opportunities in both policy and practice, emphasising the importance of space and children's community engagement.







## Recommendations for NEIC

- 1 Collaborate with school and community organisations to facilitate children's participation in the local community
- 2 Invite Children's Advisory Committee to inform local strategy - improve communication.
- 3 Funding to support the expansion of after-school provision, particularly in areas such as the arts and wellbeing which develop children's social/emotional development.

## Recommendations for National Policy

- 1 A new children's strategy to include a detailed roadmap for educators to promote meaningful participation - specifically aimed at increasing children's connection to their community in the wake of Covid-19.
- 2 Schools to be recognised as a co-location for health and education outcomes so that teachers are empowered and encouraged to tailor their practice to include children's social and emotional wellbeing, rather than academic outcomes.



# **TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE STUDENTS IN THEIR CLASSROOM EXPERIENCING BEREAVEMENT IN A DUBLIN DEIS PRIMARY SCHOOL**

By Megan Wynne M.Ed  
Rutland National School

## **Introduction**

This research endeavoured to;

- » Gain a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions of the holistic educational impacts of bereavement on their students.
- » Identify how bereavement impacts students' attendance, engagement/motivation, academic performance and behaviour.
- » Identify the current services (supports/policies) that are in place to support children who have experienced bereavement.
- » Identify how confident teachers feel in supporting children who have experienced bereavement in their classrooms.

This research endeavoured to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions of the holistic education impacts of bereavement on the primary school students that they teach. From an analysis of the current literature, it was clear that bereavement can have a huge impact on children emotionally, behaviourally, academically and socially. Holland (1993; 1999; 2004; 2008; 2015) has conducted a large body of research on the overall impacts of bereavement on primary and secondary students in an English context. Dyregrov's (2004; 2015) research focused on the impact bereavement had on academic performance and attendance in Norway. However, research on the impacts of bereavement is sparse in an Irish context with gaps in research concerning the teacher's voice and perceptions of the impact of bereavement.

A qualitative methodology was adopted for this research. Five teachers from a DEIS Band 1 vertical, co-educational primary school in inner-city Dublin were included in this research. To be included in this research, the teacher had to have a child in their class who had experienced the death of a close family member (mother, father, sibling or grandparent) in the previous five years (but not in the previous six months). Over a three-week period, the teachers kept a diary documenting observations they had made about their students regarding their learning, well-being and behaviour.

Three main findings emerged through the data analysis process. Main Finding One highlighted the holistic impact of intergenerational grief on children. Research on the topic of intergenerational grief is sparse both nationally and internationally. Children's difficulty with expressing their emotions and its subsequent impact on teacher/student relationships arose as another key finding. Ireland's lack of bereavement policies compared to other countries (such as Denmark and Australia) was also concerning.





“

Sometimes the death is very much still alive within the family unit...a death could be 10 years and still be as alive within the family...it's still as raw and an open wound as the day that it happened

”

“

Some families would visit the grave every single week so then it's hard to move on...when you have other factors in place maybe substance abuse, self-esteem issues, maybe lack of confidence and all that I think that would affect the children then

”



## Practice and Policy Recommendations Local and National Level

1

### Community-Based Centres for Family Supports

- » Community-based centres for family support in low socioeconomic areas to help heal the cycle of intergenerational grief.
- » Universal level classes for all, indicated level access to targeted supports, highest level of need access to multidisciplinary teams.

2

### Emotional Counsellors and Therapeutic Supports in Schools

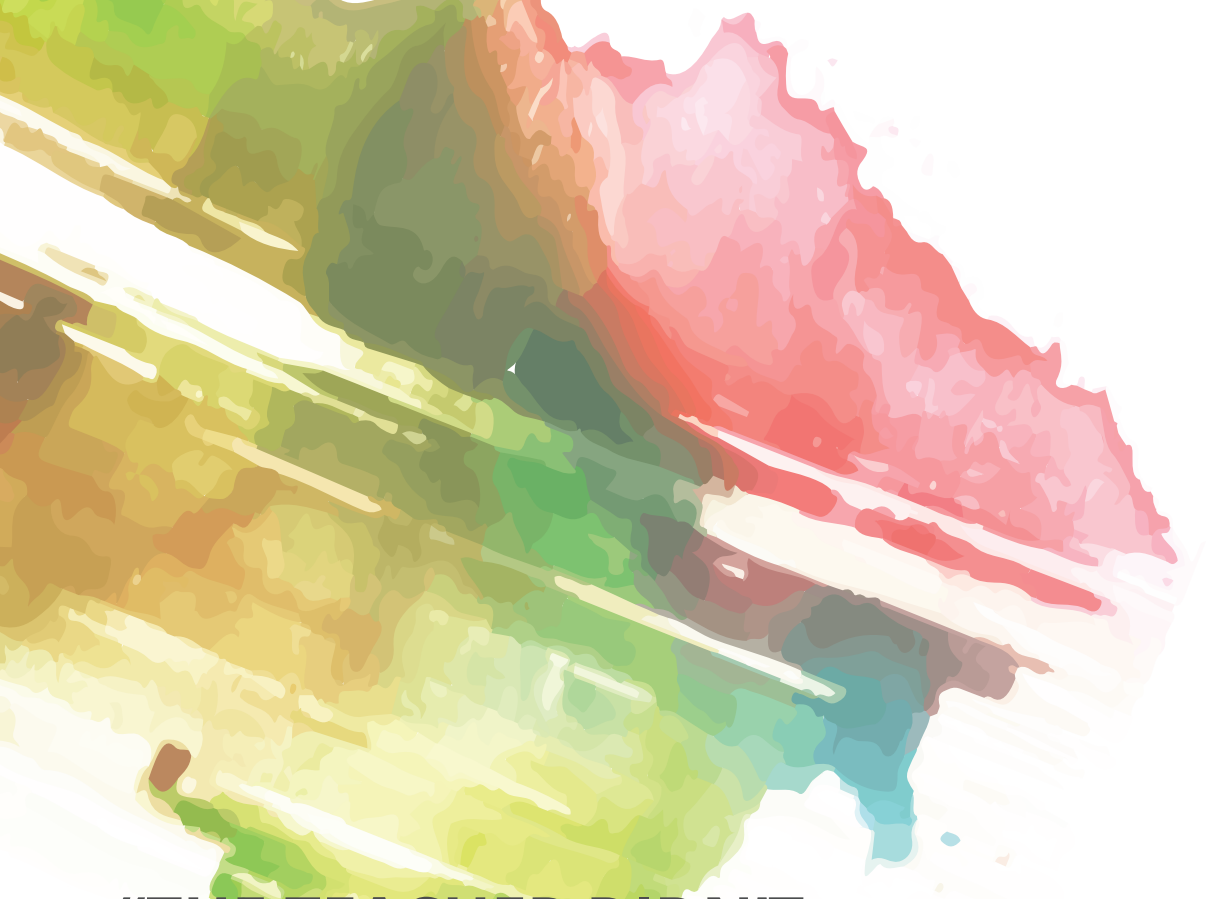
- » Allow children space to work through their grief and emotions with a qualified professional.
- » Offered to children presenting at indicated/selected level of need.
- » Government funded as opposed to ad hoc measures adopted by schools to keep the services running.
- » Opportunity for teachers to talk to professionals to seek advice.

3

### Bereavement Policies and Increase Initial Teacher Training

- » Following success in Danish schools, schools would have to create an individualised bereavement response plan/policy with support and guidance from DES.
- » Teachers should be required to engage with some level of death education during initial teacher training.





# **“THE TEACHER DIDN’T UNDERSTAND WHERE WE CAME FROM”: EXPLORING THE DAILY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED DEIS 1 PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN DUBLIN’S NORTH EAST INNER CITY**

By Fionnuala Sinnott M.Ed  
Rutland National School



This study investigated the daily school experience of pupils that attended a DEIS 1 primary school in the North East Inner City (NEIC) of Dublin. The aim of this research is to explore the overall daily school experience of these students. Moreover, this thesis gives a space to allow past students an opportunity to share their experience of what their daily experiences in primary school was like. O'Neill (1992) argues that previously published research aims to document working-class culture, “has been written from the outside in... In this sense working class culture is neither fully understood by those outside it, nor properly documented to encourage understanding” (1992, p.27).

This study offers a new lens to working-class culture, as it is inclusive of the lived experiences of a typically working- class community. Blandford (2017) highlights how historically in education it is the voices and ideas of middle-class groups that are heard and appreciated more. This study shows how the voices and opinions of working-class groups are invaluable when it comes to policy and literature that concerns them. By assuming that middle-class voices are more knowledgeable, the middle-class group begins to be allowed to decide what skills or characteristics are desirable or valued in society (Blandford, 2017).

Working in the NEIC as a teacher I wanted to enhance my knowledge and understanding of how the primary school experience impacted participants’ learning and enjoyment at school. Six participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to document their school experience. The participants’ ages ranged between 23-31. The data was analysed and collated into themes. The main findings of the study are, language differences between the students and the school, connections formed in primary school, perspective of teacher patience in primary school, and the impact of the school environment on their school experience. The data collected in the study was used to make practical recommendations to improve the school experience and learning environment for students in the NEIC. The main recommendations of this study are to build more connections through better use of community resources, more care in primary teaching approaches, and more funding should be made available to DEIS 1 schools.

## Recommendations



### 1 Building connection through greater use of community resources.

Schools should offer meaningful connections with the community for students. These opportunities can be easily incorporated with curriculum subjects, for example, literacy creating an A-Z booklet of their favourite places and resources in the school or the NEIC. In Geography students can map/show their favourite places in the NEIC. This gives students the opportunity to become the 'expert' in the area. Similarly, community resources should be used during history, pupils can document all the changes in the community they've noticed over time etc.

### 2 Continued care in teaching approach.

The findings on the impact of teacher understanding on learning justifies the use of Nel Noddings' ethics of care approach. This recommendation challenges the lack of patience, lack of understanding and lack of connection noted by the participants. To strengthen and maintain the positive impact of teachers, schools need to be relational institutions. With concise and focused planning schools and classroom can become more relational. Burns (2015) recommends that teaching in a DEIS 1 context must "incorporate and reaffirm the importance of education as a relational and caring concern" (p.11).

### 3 Building connection through more relatable content.

All participants identified that there must be more relatable content and texts used in schools. Young people are being further marginalised by having their daily experiences excluded from the curriculum (Wrigley, 2018). In practice this recommendation could include inviting members of the community into schools to document their lived experiences of the area. For example to co-create meaningful texts with the students. Relevant literature that represents the experiences of the community, can encourage feelings of pride in the area. DEIS 1 schools need to challenge unrelatable content and literature, by helping students to access and create texts that reflect their lived experiences, not the experiences of middle-class families.



# AN EXPLORATION OF PARENTAL VIEWS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN’S EARLY YEARS AND PRIMARY SCHOOLING

By Rose Duffy M.Ed  
Rutland National School

“  
The kids do  
be delighted  
when you  
come in like’  
”

## Outline



The study sought to explore parents’ views of their own involvement in their children’s early years and primary schooling. The research was conducted through focus group interviews with 11 parents in Spring 2022. During the focus groups, parents discussed their views on parental involvement in schooling and what it should look like. They also discussed the barriers and challenges they feel exist in relation to involvement.

## Background Research

Educational research in the area of parent involvement has repeatedly concluded that it is beneficial for students in that it improves academic achievement and exerts a positive influence that benefits their general development. Despite myths to the contrary, it is clear from extensive research that parents from working class backgrounds are interested in and committed to their children’s education. (Epstein et al, 2002) state that “the myth of parental indifference has been debunked in study after study” (p. 162).

Role is one factor affecting parental involvement and is defined as “parents’ beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children’s education and the actions that follow those beliefs. It has been found that when teachers offered support and emphasised the importance of parental involvement in certain areas, parents’ beliefs about the importance of their help in these areas increased.

## Findings

The current study demonstrates commitment, interest and enthusiasm on behalf of parents in a socio-economically disadvantaged area in relation to their children’s schooling. Participants in this study were resoundingly positive about involvement opportunities that enabled them to spend time with their children and involve themselves in their learning. Parents all reported enjoying in-school activities that were provided for children in the younger classes. These include ‘Maths For Fun’ and ‘Zoom Ahead with Books’. Parents liked that during activities such as these, they not only got to spend time with their child, but they also got to know the other children and parents from their child’s class. Parents would like to see lots of involvement opportunities at a variety of times with lots of advance notice to suit all work schedules.





One barrier was that some parents felt that as their children got older, they began to feel embarrassed about their parents being present in school. Nevertheless it should be stressed that parental involvement continues to be beneficial for children at all ages. Parents also felt that as children get older there were less opportunities provided by the school for them as parents to get involved and that communication tended to be less frequent and involvement opportunities less likely.

Another potential barrier to parent participation and communication was the lack of an informal space for parents to network and communicate. They felt that there could be many benefits to a 'drop in' model that encouraged parents to use the parent's room informally. Parents with negative schooling experiences may feel a sense of distrust towards the school. Giving parents the freedom to visit the Parents' Room informally and unaccompanied by staff could create a greater sense of ownership and belonging and allow parents to form partnerships.

Literacy and parents' sense of self-efficacy also arose as a topic. Participants in Focus Group 1 made the very important point that not all parents will have the same capabilities when it comes to literacy. A small cohort of parents may be unable to read and write to a standard that allows them to support their children with homework and other learning activities. It was noted that often the school will be unaware of this fact and that these parents will have coping mechanisms in place to mask their self-perceived inadequacies. A discussion arose as to how the school could identify and support parents with literacy difficulties. The point was also made that parents with literacy difficulties are highly unlikely to approach a teacher and tell them that they cannot read and write and are unable to help their child. Schools must remember that embarrassment and fear of stigma is one of the main barriers to adult literacy learners seeking support. One parent suggested that the school assume there are a cohort of parents who are unable to read and write or who read and write at low level and act in accordance with that assumption.

## Recommendations

**These recommendations are targeted to the school at the centre of the research but may also be applicable to other schools in the NEIC and to DEIS 1 schools in a similar context.**

- 1** The school should establish a parental involvement committee that includes the principal, HSCL officer and parents and develop a plan of action consisting of clear targets and goals. Positive relationships and a welcoming ethos should form the basis of any parental involvement programme. The plan should also be informed by local need.
- 2** The school should regularly consult parents in relation to their parental involvement practices, with focus groups being a useful way of doing this. Translators should be used to facilitate the involvement of parents who do not speak English.
- 3** Parental Involvement activities should be planned for all class levels.
- 4** The school should consider the literacy needs of their parents and facilitate family literacy courses. Outreach should be done in a sensitive manner and such courses should be learner-centred. Schools should also ensure they are catering for families who not speak English as a first language.
- 5** The schools should provide parents with little or no knowledge of the Irish language with the resources necessary to assist their children.

“  
Parent D: Oh just bring it home, your Dad can help you with that homework, you're kind of going 'okay'  
”

“  
Parent F: Sometimes the Dad can't you know, or the Ma can't  
”

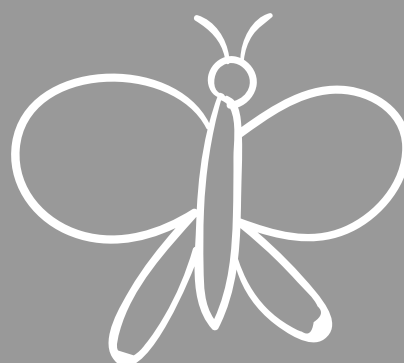
“  
Parent D: Someone is not going to come up to a teacher and go 'actually, you know when you send that homework home, I'm not able'  
”

“  
Parent D: The best thing about the Parents' Room is that it allows stuff to be thrashed out. Like parents solve problems quicker than anybody else will solve problems. Because they're all dealing with problems every day with their kids  
”



## **WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT THE NEIC? - AN EXPLORATION OF A GROUP OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT IN NORTH EAST INNER CITY DUBLIN**

By Orla Doyle M.Ed  
St Vincents Boy's Infant School



Increasingly, research into children's geography highlights the importance of young children's experiences in their locality, the value that lies in examining these with children, and the potential for empowering children to be active citizens through using participatory methods (Barratt-Hacking et al., 2007; Bourke, 2017; Chawla, 2002; Derr, 2006; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Pike, 2011; Nguyen Templeton, 2020). Taking this as its point of departure, this research investigates a group of young children's experiences of their local environment in the North East Inner City (NEIC) of Dublin. Specifically, it explores how they interact with and understand their locality, the types and qualities of places they value and how they feel about their local environment.

The research took place with a group of 11 children, all male and under the age of 6, and was conducted during curricular geography time. Clark & Moss's (2011) listening framework- the Mosaic approach- was employed so that the children's experiences of places could be explored in the most authentic way possible. Data were collected using multiple methods including children's drawings, model making, neighbourhood walks, photographs, discussion and interviews.

Analysis of the data revealed that the children possessed a wealth of knowledge about their local environments and interacted with them, and within them, socially, physically, practically and playfully. Children showed preference for proximal places and outdoor spaces that afforded them the opportunity to play, interact with others and experience nature. The children demonstrated positive attitudes towards where they lived and frequently connected places in the locality to people they valued and happy memories they held.

The findings indicate that young children know their local environments intimately and are willing and able to communicate their knowledge and opinions, if they are given opportunities to do so. More research is needed into young children's personal geographies in order to value their knowledge and improve geography education in Ireland. Furthermore, the children's positive views of their locality also suggests that prevailing attitudes in the public realm about the NEIC are at odds with the lived experiences of the children living there. This indicates an urgent need to consult children and involve them in any further community development in the NEIC. Adults may have certain expertise but without children's input we run the risk of making changes to local environments that hinder, rather than improve, children's wellbeing (Chawla, 2002; Derr, 2006).





“

I have a friend in the shop. He works there. There's a giant press and he sleeps in there and there's little pedals so he can get out  
(John, Age 5)

”

“

I've never been this way before, it's like walking through another city  
(Harvey, Age 5)

”

“

I had my birthday party here. You see that table? I had a cake right there [points]  
(Sean, Age 5)

”

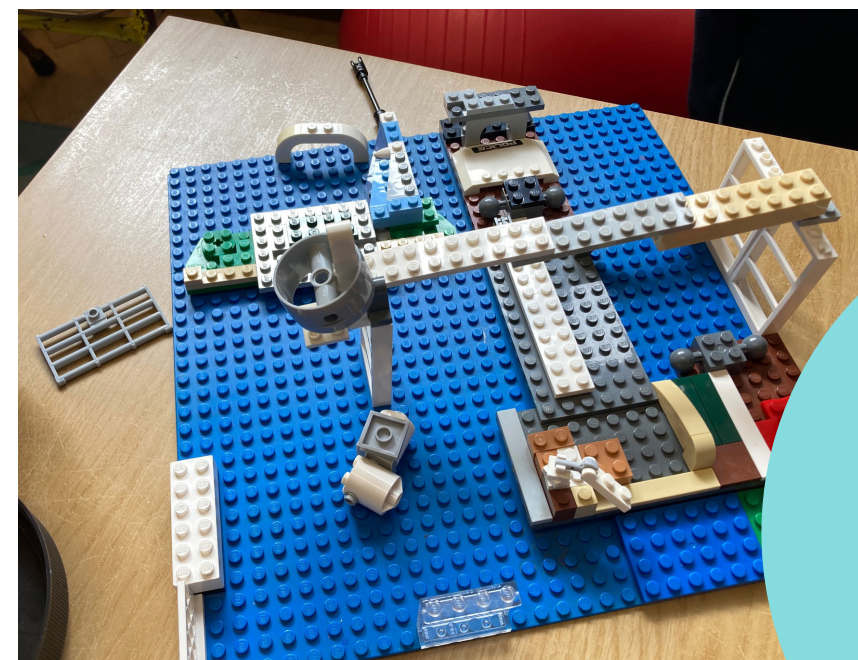
Harvey, Drawing of Mountjoy Square Park



“

I like when I play with my sister and I also like once my mammy brings me there because it makes me happy and a little bit in the green zone and the yellow zone. And after I go to it I kinda feel a little bit in the blue zone cos I'm very tired of playing”  
(Harvey, Age 5)

”



Jamie and Alex, model of Fairview Park

“

Fairview is my favourite because it got done up  
(Daniel, Age 5)

”

Fishpond on Empress Place



“

This is the house where I was talking about where the fish are. Me and my brother are going to it. [why do you like this place?] Because I like going to see the fish. [How do you feel when you are there?] Happy, excited and calm  
(Scott, Age 5)

”





## CHILDREN'S CAREER ASPIRATIONS: A FOCUS ON TEACHING AS A FUTURE CAREER

By Lauren O'Callaghan M.Ed  
Central Model Senior School

This study documented the career aspirations of ten nine and ten-year-old children attending a culturally diverse, DEIS Band 1 primary school in the North East Inner City. The lack of cultural diversity in the teaching profession (Heinz & Keane, 2018) motivated me to explore these children's aspirations towards teaching and their perceptions of teachers and teaching as a career in particular. They were interviewed in two separate focus groups of five children each. They also completed a drawing activity in which they drew what a teacher looks like to them.



Children of this age are likely to have a well-rounded concept of themselves, their career aspirations often influenced by their own values and interests (Seligman, 1991).

As such, many of the children aspired to become sports people:

**"Like, I know a doctor gets paid like... €200,000 a day or a week...but now you're a footballer, and you play really good, you could get €400,000 a day! Ronaldo gets 50 billion per day."**

A number of children expressed a desire to work in the same jobs as their parents. This was also consistent with similar research (Jungen, 2008).

Only one child expressed a clear aspiration towards teaching. Most children could name reasons why they did not want to become a teacher:

**"The reason why I would definitely not like to be a teacher is because it's so much responsibility."**

**"I would hate to work as a teacher. Like, I have one sibling and he has a friend. I cannot even handle the two of them! How can you handle, like, twenty kids?!"**

Many of the children viewed teaching as a responsible job, one that requires patience and hard work. Some children felt that teachers even had a certain clean-cut 'look.'

The children commented on the lack of cultural diversity within the teaching staff in the school, and how this did not reflect the diversity of the pupil population. None of the children conceptualised a non-White teacher in their drawings, despite most of the participants being of colour. Many children expressed a concern that teachers could not communicate with them in their home language.

I would recommend that children be facilitated to explore career options at a young age. I also suggest that steps be taken to encourage young people from migrant backgrounds to consider teaching as a career. Perhaps, programmes already in place such as Turn to Teaching (Maynooth University, 2017) could be expanded upon.

Overall, this study provided a valuable insight into the career aspirations of some children living in the NEIC. It highlighted the lack of motivation to pursue teaching as a career among such children, and encouraged me to question why this is the case.

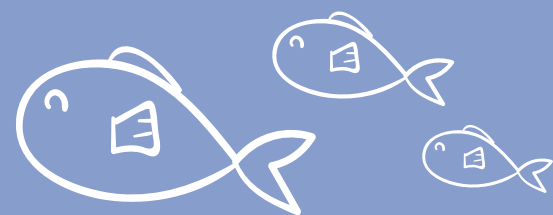
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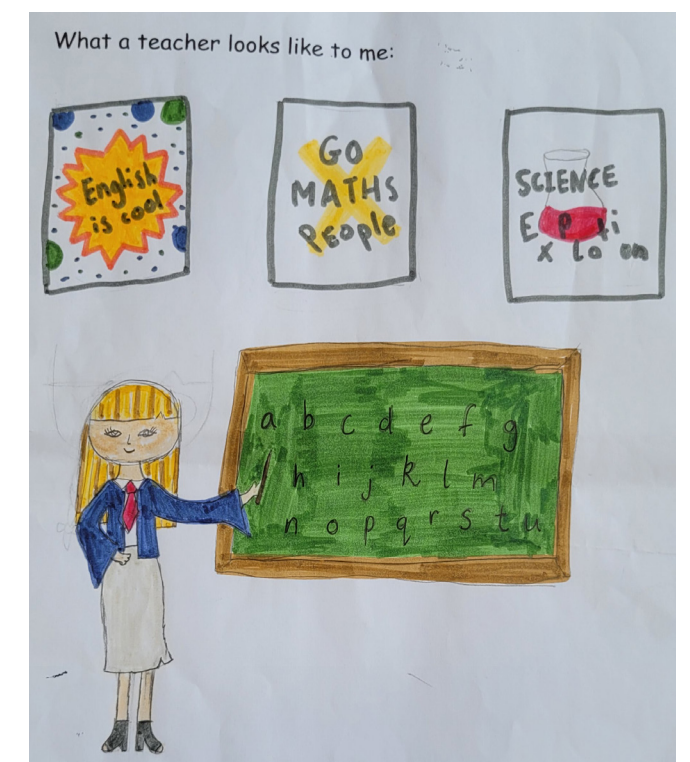
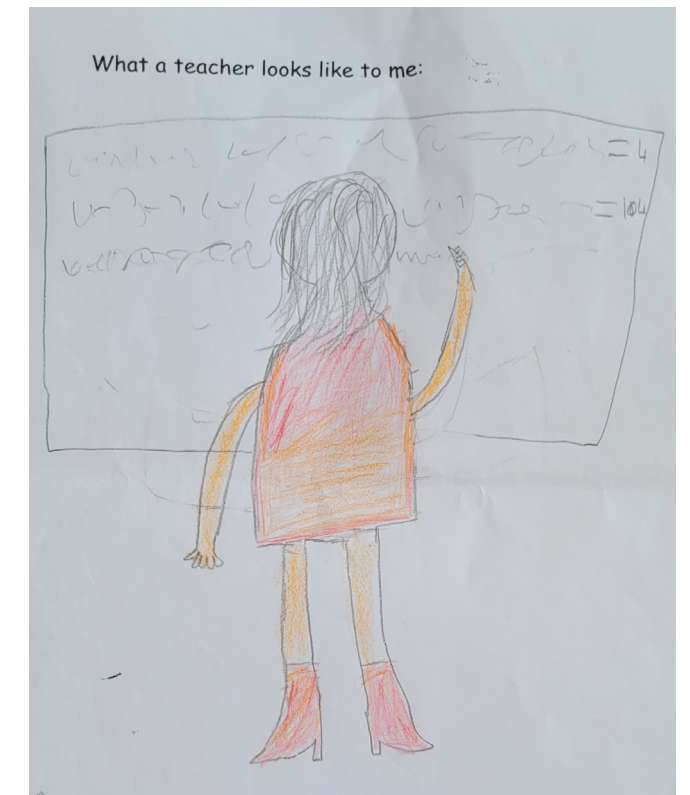
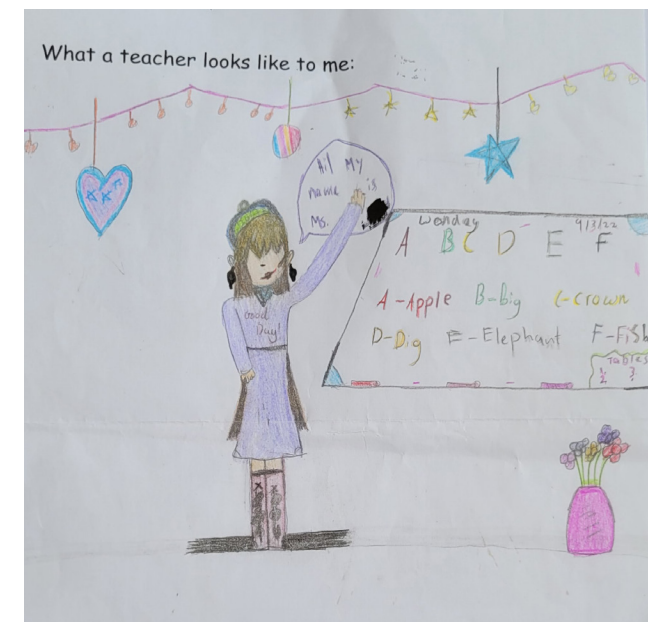
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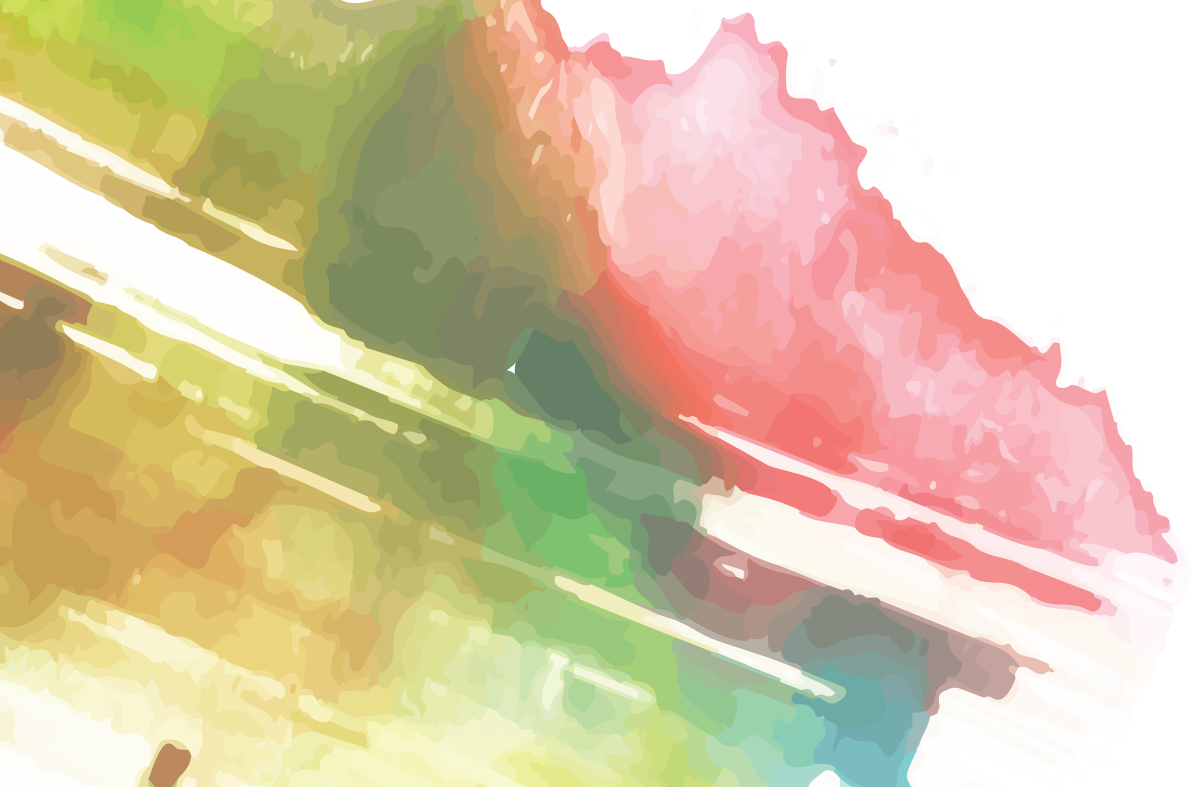
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“With teachers that are from other countries, kids can learn about their culture and country and their language and stuff. It would just be a very fun place to be (Child aged 10).”







# A RECONCEPTUALISATION OF FROEBEL’S APPROACH TO NATURE TO EXAMINE THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN A SCHOOL GARDEN ON THEIR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A DEIS BAND 1 PRIMARY SCHOOL

By Seána Brady M.Ed  
Central Model Senior School

The aim of this study was to examine children’s experiences and the perceived impact of participation in a school garden on children’s social and emotional development in a senior urban DEIS Band 1 primary school.


The researcher reconceptualised Froebel’s approach to nature by including a poverty angle, extending the age group from kindergarteners to late primary school children, and by placing an emphasis on a group approach to gardening. There is growing interest in the area of nature and outdoor education, especially in a post COVID-19 world. The researcher sought to utilise this period of reflection by introducing a school garden and examining whether it could become a concentric space of assumed connection between children and nature. The researcher, alongside the child participants, created and developed a school garden in an area of high socio-economic exclusion. A qualitative action research approach was taken. This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 2 teachers and 18 children, backed up by field notes recorded by the researcher. Interviews were analysed thematically. The findings of this study revealed that the school garden presents multidimensional social and emotional benefits for children regarding well-being, relaxation, responsibility, relational skills, and inclusion. These were also perceived by their teachers, who additionally reported improved motivation and leadership were prevalent amongst the child participants. This research study presents scope for a national school garden pilot project to be implemented across schools, as an interventive support to promote children’s social and emotional development, particularly in DEIS schools located in areas of high socio-economic exclusion. Findings from the research also demonstrate the need for teachers’ continuous professional development in the area of gardening in schools, to aid with the successful integration of nature into schools. Additionally, there is further scope to incorporate a cooking component into a national school garden policy to reap both the social emotional as well as nutritional benefits, whereby kitchens and portable cooking equipment would be provided to schools.

## Recommendations


National Policy   Local Practice




### National




**Funding**  
Through Food Dudes Programme



**DEIS Plan**  
Nature missing from DEIS plan




**School buildings**  
Design – guidelines




**Extension**  
Include a cooking component – life skills and nutrition


### Local – NEIC



**Nature in Schools**  
Follow on from Mulvey report NEIC Greening Strategy



**Teacher CPD**  
Finding from research Teacher’s confidence Link with teaching & learning



**Cooking component**  
Use of kitchens, provision portable cooking equipment





## **RECONFIGURATION OF POWER IN AN INFANT CLASSROOM SETTING**

The Perspectives and Insights of Teachers  
and Learners

Michael Kennedy M.Ed  
St Vincents Boy's Infant School

## **Reconfiguration of Power in an Infant Classroom Setting: The Perspectives and Insights of Teachers and Learners**

The recommendations are organised in three levels.

### **For the classrooms**

- » To increase the amount flexible seating options.
- » To develop student's voice by consulted children about timetabling, organisation of resources and the classroom design.
- » And Nurture corners or safe spaces are introduced into mainstream infant classrooms.

### **For the school**

- » Uniform policies should include the child's voice and policies to include options to remove shoes.
- » Covid-19 restrictions on parent's access to the school to be reintroduced in at least the same level as before the pandemic.
- » A full return to dining together and holding weekly assemblies.
- » Provide CPD, mentoring and in-school support to develop infant teachers' understanding of their role within the Aistear curriculum framework.

### **National Level**

- » Legal guidelines outlining the teacher's role delivering Aistear are published to inform policy and support both the infant and Aistear curriculum's implementation.

### **Children's voices**

- » Difference of opinions of the drum set: Child A, "it's so cool, there is headphones and everything about it is cool". Child B "I don't like the drums because they are really noisy".
- » Child C chose to dress up when given a choice of activity. His showed a clear preference by saying "I like drawing, but I love to dress up". When he was probed about what surprised him the most he replied, "the dress up corner, I just love costumes".
- » Child D explained, "I like drawing, I like the way you can make a different thing over and over again". When asked what he found easy, he said "I love drawing, I feel like I just want to draw now".
- » On Hide and Seek: Child E explained, "I like hiding because when you hide and no one finds you, you can jump out and shout surprise". Child F expressed, that "my favourite place in the school is in the garden because you can hide". Child G also commented that he enjoyed the boat play structure "because you can hide in it".



# Teacher Voices on power in the classroom

- » Both Teacher A and B expressed a desire for an equal balance of power in the classroom. Teacher A said, “I’d love to say that it was a 50/50 balance” while Teacher B admitted that “I would love to say there was an equal balance of power in the classroom”. She further explained how she, the teacher, needed to be in control of the student’s time organisation and movement within the room.
- » Teacher C alluded to a “tricky” dynamic in which “You’re always watching it to get the balance right”. A similar dynamic was highlighted by Devine (2000) between the reflexivity of children as “active agents” and teachers’ social and administrative control suggesting that “teacher power and control within the classroom is never complete”.

This study aims to explore the dynamic of power between children and teachers in an infant classroom setting. Indeed, this dynamic is constantly changing due social and economic influences. 100 years ago, the teacher student relationship was significantly different. It was much more authoritarian in nature. Dympna Devine describes how authoritarian education was done onto children for the benefit of the church anhed state to produce obedient members of society that could serve the labour force. Both Devine and Coolahan point to the 1960’s as a period of significant political, economic, social and cultural change due to a policy of industrialisation and the emergence of feminism among other factors. They describe how strengthened bonds of affection between parents and children along with developments in **child psychology** meant the child was beginning to be **seen as an individual**. Curricular changes reflected this. An overarching aim of the 1971 new curriculum was **‘to enable the child to live a full life as a child’**. Today, teacher student relationships in infant classrooms are mostly caring, compassionate and more positive one than ever before. Part of the purpose of this study was to explore how why and when these changes came about. Habermas provides key understandings of the transition from a pre secular society to a secular and post secular one. However, the main purpose of this research is how this changing dynamic of power between teachers and students can maximise participation and engagement in the classroom.

The focus of this research, therefore, explores how increased participation and engagement will have a direct influence on educational outcomes for the children. The role of classroom design in the distribution of power was also closely considered.

The timing of this study and the context in which it took place is important to be aware of. It took place when schools were emerging from the COVID 19 pandemic. The effects that school closures and social distancing has had on young children are not yet fully realised. This study will try to reach a more in-dept understanding of how young children were affected by these restrictions.

The theory underpinning this paper include Michel Foucault’s beliefs on how power is experienced and exercised. For example, a teacher’s disciplinary gaze possesses minute control over the child’s behavior, because it internalises the force of the entire school structure. A structure in which the child, teachers and parents all interact, often unknowingly to support. Originally used in French prisons the Panopticon induced “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”. Foucault believed that the applications of the Panopticon are not only to reform prisoners but can be extended to the instruction of school children. This study aims to reimagine classroom design that breaks down the “automatic functioning of power” as described by Foucault.

The children in this study come from a socially disadvantaged area in Dublin, the teachers do not, they are all from middleclass backgrounds. Differences in habitus are highlighted in language use according to Bernstein. His linguistic codes are significant in understanding inequality in education as schools favour the elaborated linguistic code. This research examines teacher’s awareness of these codes and their expectations on those who exercise restrictive language.

The United Nations convention the rights of the child paved the way for a range of legislative and curricular changes which had a direct impact on power in primary school. It gave rights for student voices to be listened to and acted upon. The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, Aistear and the arrival of nurture education, changed teacher led pedagogies to more child led ones.

This was a small qualitative study with 5 teachers and 13 students from junior and senior infant classes. It took place in a DEIS band 1 infant school in NEIC Dublin. The research site was the school Nurture room. All the children who attended the nurture room were invited to take part in the research.

The teachers completed 30-minute semi-structured interviews and 5 themes were discussed.

The children however worked as co researchers. The reason for this decision was determined by ethical considerations. Children working as co-researchers ensured their right to participation as outlined in article 12 of the UNCRC. Their right to protection was ensured by securing ethical approval from Dublin City University.

The key findings were then categorised into two groups. Those relating to the redistribution of power and those relating to classroom design. Surveillance played a significant role in how students experienced power in the classroom. There was a clear correlation between positive relationships and engagement. This was strongly supported by literature addressing nurture education and attachment theory. Teacher control over the time and movement of students was significant, however teachers did respond positively to the idea of flexible seating which holds exciting possibilities for classrooms in the future.





# Recommendations and Further Research

## Classroom

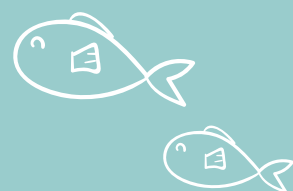
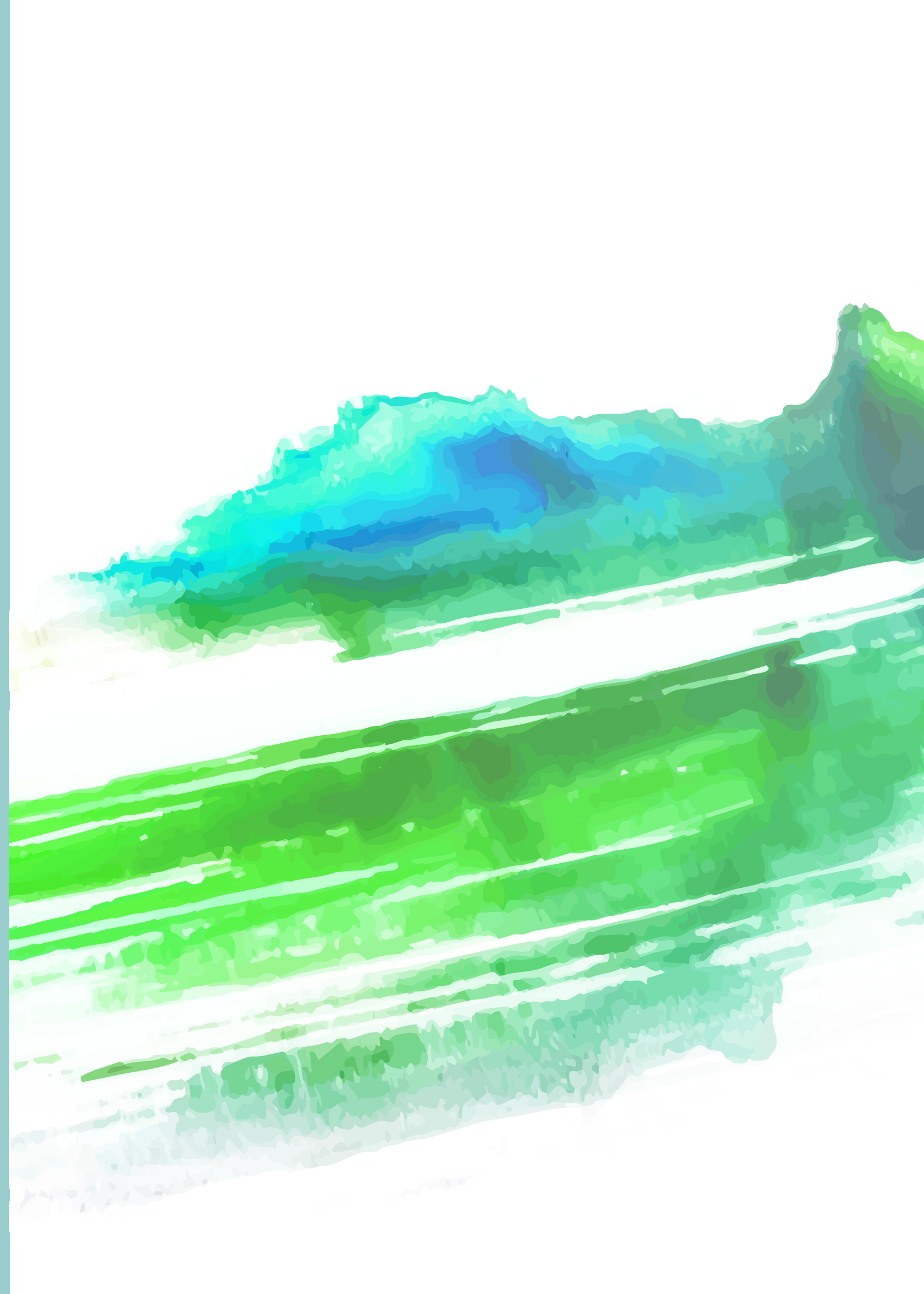
- » Flexible seating options available.
- » Consultation with children in classroom organisation, timetabling and design.
- » Nurture corner in mainstream classroom.

## School

- » Consideration of uniform policies, comfortability and options to remove shoes.
- » Covid-19 restrictions on parent's access to the school building and yards should be reconsidered and restored.
- » Provide CPD, mentoring and support that will enhance infant teacher's understanding of their role within the Aistear curriculum.

## National

- » Legal guidelines outlining the teachers role in delivering the Aistear curriculum are published to inform policy and support both the infant and Aistear curriculum's implementation.







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