

# How adults' perceptions of childhood impact policy developments in Ireland with specific emphasis on play in the construct of the Early-Years Education-Focused model of Inspection by the Department of Education and Science.

Keelin O'Grady, Mary Immaculate College.

## INTRODUCTION

As an early childhood student, the researcher expected to see play interwoven into the Early-years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI) model of inspection, inspected by inspectors and documented in inspection reports but is this the reality? This has been the focal point of this research. In a recent study *'Making a Difference: The Impact of Statutory Inspection on the Quality of Early Years Services'* (Rouine et al., 2020), it was stated *'The inspectorate successfully identifies noncompliance's in respect of children's health, welfare and development, and the safety and governance of the service, the premises and facilities.* (ibid), however, play is omitted? Why? Highlighting the importance of this research and how it is pertinent and significant to modern early childhood policy, the effect of contrasting stances on childhood and the value of play was investigated. The influence of chronological developments in policy associated with the present inspection criteria of play in Ireland was examined. The insights provided by this research aim to clarify how play is inspected by the DES inspectors and stand as a advisor for practitioners and settings to surpass the requirements of the EYEI model of inspection and highlight best practice to ensure holistic development of children in Ireland.

## ABSTRACT

As of January 2010, the free pre-school year (FPY) under the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) Scheme regulated by the Department of Education and Science (DES) requires all preschools availing of the state-funded ECCE scheme *'for children aged more than three years two months and less than four years seven months on 1 Sept in the relevant pre-school year'* (DES, 2014) adapt the play-based curriculum, Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2009) and the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education - Síolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE, 2006). Both of which exemplify the importance of play for children. Research suggests that there are diverse views on the value of play. Presiding discourses are inclined to either view play as an intrinsically valuable process or place value on equipment or materials used in play.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To establish whether, and to what extent play is incorporated into the EYEI model of inspection.

2. To identify specifically how the EYEI model of inspection is inspecting play.

3. To assess how play is documented in inspection reports.

## FINDINGS

The research shows that play is incorporated into the EYEI model of inspection in each of the four areas of the report. Play was referenced twenty eight times in total – twenty six times as play as an activity, twice regarding the materials. Interestingly, the accompanying chart (see Figure 1) shows the need to examine the changing perceptions of adults' view of play and its impact on policy developments as the view adults place on play are changing constantly with time, and adults perceptions are behind the desired perceptions of the DES.

**FIGURE 1:**

