

British Early Childhood Education Research Association CONFERENCE (BECERA),
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The Art of Practice based Inquiry: Early Childhood Professionals & Research

Using action research to support and develop quality practice

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Research Aims and Questions

How effective is action research as a professional development tool? The aim was to improve quality in fourteen community-based ECCE centres through the implementation of the *Síolta, The Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (Síolta)* (CECDE 2006) and *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (Aistear)* (NCCA 2009).

Relationship to previous studies by others and self:

The findings of an independent evaluation of the project by Moloney (2010) are incorporated as well as research done on the management and implementation change including CECDE (2006), Fullan (2005; 2008) and Alvestad and Rothle (2007).

Theoretical & conceptual framework of research:

A community action research approach, which creates a learning community that works together to 'nurture and sustain a knowledge-creating system', based on valuing equally each other, was used (Senge and Scharmer 2001, 240).

Paradigm, methodology & methods

The action reflection cycle of observe, reflect, act, evaluate and modify (McNiff and Whitehead 2006) informed the development of the programme and ensured that plans were implemented. Learning networks (NCSL 2002), reflective practice and 'dynamic conversations' (Schón 1983) were key elements

Ethical Considerations:

The National College of Ireland's Code of Conduct for Researchers was observed. Good practice in relation to action research was followed.

Main finding or discussion:

Participants found the programme easy to understand and useful to their practice. The combination of purposeful peer interaction and learning through action helped improve the quality of teaching and learning in their settings.

Implications, practice or policy

Educational innovation abounds with policies that are not implemented (Fullan et al 2005). Action research supports the implementation of change in a way that enhances participants' capabilities, both individually and collectively, to produce results they truly care about (Senge and Scharmer 2001, 240).

Keywords: Action Research, Early Child Professionalism, Practice based inquiry, Knowledge, Leadership