Documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach: A Case Study Exploring Family and Practitioners’ Perceptions and Experiences

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Stephanie Nicole Sagmoen Siqueira

Documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach: A Case Study
Exploring Family and Practitioners’ Perceptions and Experiences

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus joint degree “International Master of Early Childhood Education and Care”
Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

Dublin Institute of Technology
University of Gothenburg
University of Malta

August 2015
DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfillment of the award named above.

Signature of candidate:

August 2015
Early childhood settings are diverse and challenging and building strong relationships between practitioners and families is vital. This research was framed around the aim to identify the factors influencing the perspectives and experiences of early childhood practitioners and families in relation to the use of pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach. Additionally, the research aims to identify the benefits of using pedagogical documentation as a tool in the Anti-Bias Approach for building relationships. Nine semi-structured interviews with early childhood practitioners and parents/family members as well as a qualitative analysis of pedagogical documentation was conducted. Data analysis suggests five key factors influencing practitioner and parent relationships including time use; resources; language; clear expectations; attitudes, beliefs and values. Additionally, the benefits of the use of documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach have been identified under three themes, identity and sense of belonging, representation of culture and effective engagement of parents and family members.

**Keywords:** pedagogical documentation, Anti-Bias Approach, practitioners’ perspectives, diversity and equality in early childhood
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This opportunity would not have been a reality without the endless and blind support of my Mom. Thank you for believing this could be my reality and pushing me to succeed on days when I couldn’t do it myself.

Finally, to my dearest Felipe, your patience and support as I dragged our life around the world has proven we are the best team. Thank you for always being on my team!
LIST OF USED ACRONYMS

CECDE - Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

DCRT- Durham Community Research Team

DIT- Dublin Institute of Technology

EACEA - Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care

EDeNn- Equality and Diversity early childhood National network

FETAC- Further Education and Training Awards Council

NCCA- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

OECD- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OMC- Office of the Minister for Children

QQI- Quality and Qualifications Ireland

UN – United Nations

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNCRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context of the Study

Recognition of diversity and equality within all levels of education, including early childhood education and care, has become an important issue in Ireland, particularly in the past 15 to 20 years. Ireland has an increasing number of immigrants, which has created urgency for education to be effective (EACEA, 2009). Ireland has responded to this growth with the development of policies on diversity and equality as well as the development of guiding documents for practitioners in early childhood settings. These three national documents are Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006), The Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (Office of the Minister for Children, 2006) and Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Document (NCCA, 2009). These documents encourage the creation of early childhood environments that embraces diversity and equality. In an early childhood setting where diversity is embraced the role of the parents is integral as they are the source of knowledge in relation to each child’s social background and cultural heritage.

1.2. Rationale of the Study

This study has grown out of a topic I have been exploring for over ten years in my own practice. Pedagogical documentation was something I first heard of in 2004. My thinking around documenting young children’s work has been primarily focused on using it in the setting with the children. It has been a tool that I use that is constantly evolving and changing. A second very influential factor in the development of this study is my own cultural background. Born and raised in Canada has allowed me to witness diversity and equality. By coming to Europe to engage in a master degree programme I have been able to reflect and see many positives in the way of life in Canada. After seeing the challenges diversity can bring to communities, and my exposure to new ideas through course work, I have connected my long-term practice of documentation to the practice of the Anti-Bias Approach.
1.3. Main Aim, Research Questions and Methodological Approach

The aim of this research is to identify the factors influencing the perspectives and experiences of early childhood practitioners and families in relation to the use of pedagogical documentation as a part of the Anti-Bias Approach. Additionally, identifying the benefits of using pedagogical documentation as a tool within the Anti-Bias Approach.

The research methodology of this case study has been designed to address the following research questions:

1. What factors are perceived to support the use of pedagogical documentation as a part of the Anti-Bias Approach in developing strong relationships between practitioners and families?

2. What factors are perceived to hinder the use of pedagogical documentation as a part of the Anti-Bias Approach in developing strong relationships between practitioners and families?

3. What are the perceived benefits of using documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach to build strong relationships between practitioners and families?

With consideration to the research aim and questions, this case study was based on the collection and use of qualitative data as it best suited the need to share a comprehensive understanding of practices and experiences. To best support this methodology, semi-structured interviews of a limited number of participants from a single setting and qualitative analysis of pedagogical documentation was implemented. This allowed for in depth engagement with the experiences and practices surrounding pedagogical documentation, the Anti-Bias Approach and the development of strong relationships.

The ethical considerations in relation to this research were considered and addressed in accordance with the DIT Research ethics guidelines. These considerations are discussed and addressed further in Chapter Three.

1.4. Definitions of Key Terms

*Aistear*: the early childhood curriculum framework in Ireland designed for
implementation in any type of service for children from birth to six years. *Aistear* is the Irish word meaning ‘journey’.

**Curriculum:** “all the experiences, formal and informal, planned and unplanned in the indoor and outdoor environment, which contribute to children’s learning and development” (NCCA, 2009, p. 54).

**Early childhood settings:** “centre-based ECEC is collective (more than 5 children) early education and care for young children from 6-12 months to 6 years, distinguished from services provided in households or family settings” (OECD, 2006, p. 227). It includes “crèches, kindergartens, pre-school (normally 3-6 years) and publicly provided pre-primary classes, but not playgroups, or out-of-school care” (OECD, 2006, p. 227).

**Early Childhood Practitioner:** “all men and women working in ECEC settings that provide non-parental education for children under compulsory school age” (University of East London & University of Ghent, 2011).

**HighScope:** HighScope's educational approach emphasizes “active participatory learning.” Active learning means students have direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas. Children’s interests and choices are at the heart of HighScope programs” (Epstein, 2015, para. 3)

**Síolta:** the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education is a guiding document in Ireland that aims to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of early childhood in settings where children aged birth to six years are present.

1.5. **Thesis Outline**

This research report is composed of the following chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Three: Design and Methodology

Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations
The first chapter is an introduction to establish the foundation of the thesis. It identifies the main aim and research questions. Additionally it summarises the purpose and context of the study for the reader.

Chapter Two discusses the relevant theoretical and research literature as well as national and international policy documents with a particular focus on the Irish context. After the introduction the following section of this chapter identified the challenges or common limitations in building partnerships between practitioners and families as well as the benefits of those relationships. The second section aims to recognise the diversity of curriculum approaches. The Anti-Bias Approach is discussed as well as other common approaches to diversity. This is followed by a discussion of relevant influential national and international policy documents. The final section is an in depth examination at what pedagogical documentation is, its purposes and factors influencing its implementation.

Chapter Three clearly and concisely describes the design and methodology of the research project. It outlines the practicable structure as to how the research was conducted including key elements such as the research design, instruments, analysis and ethical approach.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research which emerged from analysis of the semi-structured interviews and pedagogical documentation. The thematic analysis of the data allows for themes and sub-themes to emerge and these findings are discussed in relation to the literature presented in Chapter Two. A critically reflective process can be seen in the comparisons and contrasts discussed in this chapter.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Five, summarises the thesis with particular reference to Chapters Four. Implications of the research as well as any further recommendations are also discussed.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The intricacies of inclusion and exclusion are an aspect of the societies that children are exposed to at a young age (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). However, belonging is essential to a child’s well-being and to the awareness of his/her rights as a member of a society (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). Awartani, Whitman and Gordon (2008) define belonging as “feeling part of community; caring and being cared for; contributing to one’s community” (p.61). Throughout history minority groups have resisted the dominant majority perspectives of their role in the world, therefore suggesting the “deep roots of cultural identity” (Murray & O'Doherty, 2004, p. 20). These deep roots indicate that cultural diversity rather than one dominating group should be seen as the ‘norm’ (Murray & O'Doherty, 2004). In the current era of a globalised world children and family may be more likely to have “hyphenated identities… compound identities… multiple identities [or] plural identities” (Bernard van Leer Foundation programme staff, 2008, p. 30). Multiple and plural identities have created an opportunity where children can have multiple and plural belongings, this being more likely than their parents whose identities may have been constrained in a less globalized society (Bernard van Leer Foundation programme staff, 2008). Also due to the complexities of multiple and plural identities teachers and other adults are often slow to recognize this in introducing a child to the setting or group (Bernard van Leer Foundation programme staff, 2008). Therefore creating an inclusive atmosphere is more than just sharing a physical space (Janson, 2001). A practitioners’ understanding of sense of belonging must go beyond physical proximity to the understanding that the connections are made by “jointly doing, thinking and expressing something” (Janson, 2001. p. 136).

Children may perceive implicit messages, which devalue their ethnicity, language, religion or any difference, therefore creating an environment that is inappropriate (Wagner, 2008). However, if early acknowledgement is positive, children are more likely to develop confidence and resilience to support further recognition of their rights (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). Research shows that by the age of three children are racially aware and this can be demonstrated in both positive and negative actions and
attitudes (Mac Naughton, 2006). However, “mere exposure to diversity may be insufficient” (Mac Naughton, 2006, p. 5) for young children, signifying the importance of the content of pedagogies and practice (Friendly, 2007; Mac Naughton, 2006; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). Early childhood pedagogy has the ability to have an impact on children but adults and families as well; within the right conditions it may be a primary means for developing and expanding a society of social inclusion and belonging (Friendly, 2007). The OECD’s report Starting Strong II (2006) identifies ten policies areas as an extension to the original eight key elements of early childhood policy (OECD, 2001). The recommendations include focusing on the social context of the early childhood; ensuring well-being is at the core while respecting children’s agency and encouraging family involvement among other recommendations (OECD, 2006). These policy extension areas may begin to create the right conditions for the expansion of societal inclusion and belonging.

2.2. Developing Strong Practitioner and Family Relationships

Within the development of societal inclusion the relationship between practitioners and families is central for a child’s sense of belonging and identity. However, these relationships progress differently for each parent, family member and practitioner. Urban (2008) identifies that

early childhood education is a messy business. Its “practice” unfolds in interactions between children and adults, individuals and groups, families and communities, laypersons and “professionals” – all pursuing their own and often contradictory interests. These relationships are all but static. (p. 144)

In developing these ‘all but static relationships’ many aspects must be considered in ensuring all participants can have the benefits of positive and strong relationships in the early childhood.

2.2.1. Identifying Challenges

In addressing challenges or limitations in making an honest and strong connection with families there is not one right way to do it. A partnership between families and practitioners is both parties’ responsibilities (Harper & Pelletier, 2010). Pugh and D’Ath (as cited in Siraj-Blatchford & Clark, 2000) define partnership as “a working
relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and willingness to negotiate” (p.98). However, disclosing personal information, cultural perspectives, language, time and perceived role of stakeholders are common challenges in developing partnerships.

Each child and family is unique and often disclosing personal information can be a challenge due to the personal circumstance, the sensitivity of the information or the request for privacy. Research has shown that parents often do not disclose information about their child’s home, moreover some parents found it inappropriate for the early childhood setting to inquire about home life (De Gioia, 2009). Though there may be a lack of information shared, practitioners may begin to privilege the idea of entitlement to information over the rights of families to privacy (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). ‘Privileging’ is unfair as it assumes a right to information and implies families that do not disclose information are ‘bad’ (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). There are several ways in which this can be addressed. Firstly, a clear link made by practitioners to families as to how the information supports the care and education of their child may help facilitation communication (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). Secondly, acknowledgement that a difference in opinion is normal, particularly in relation to privacy and that all opinions should be respected (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). Finally, it is important to respect the information that is shared. Some information may be helpful in the care of an individual child but it may or may not add to the care of all children (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). This can be a difficult challenge to overcome and practitioners must be critically reflective as to why the information is important to their practice and services offered to families. Critical reflection goes beyond the practice of systematically looking at ones own practice to engaging with how things could be done differently in relation to diverse values that may be more equitable for all families (Murray & Urban, 2012). If the information is important they must communicate with families but also respect their right to deny sharing the information (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011).

As information is shared it can be a window into the unique culture and background of a child (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). Children attend an early childhood setting with the knowledge, beliefs and values of their families and community from their first
teachers: parents and family members (McGee Banks, 2010). These cultural experiences are unique to each child and family and cannot be generalized based on ethnicity, religion or any other factor (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). There must be open communication between practitioners and families to identify the specifics of their expectations for a child’s education (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). Open community will look differently for each family but it is important that practitioners look critically at their interactions to ensure all parties are engaging in dialogue.

As the world becomes more and more affected by globalization the diversity of languages in a community grows, affecting how people are able to engage in dialogue. As more languages are introduced into a community they are also introduced into the early childhood settings. Cavallaro identifies one of the most significant factors for a sense of ethnic group memberships is language (as cited in Park, 2013). Therefore it is important that language is fostered and supported in all areas of a child’s life. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model as both the home and educational environments influence children and possibly even more importantly the environments influence each other (Hess & Schultz, 2008). However, this diversity in languages can be a challenge for practitioners and families to navigate and address. Often language policies reflect the view of English as the dominant language, and therefore may need to be adjusted to reflect diversities of languages spoken in the community. Gougeon (as cited in Guo, 2006) identifies that parents, as English language learners, may even rely on their children for translating or interpreting communication from school. However this responsibility may not be appropriate for children based on their language abilities and the sensitivity of topics. If practitioners and families do not share a common language it is important that they find ways to communicate and the supports needed.

Practitioners are often limited in their understanding of second language acquisition and are lacking the training needed.

Research has shown that multilingualism is an asset and this resource should be encouraged (Park, 2013). However, practitioners identified that particularly in relation to the assessment of the appropriateness of materials multilingualism can be challenging to implement (Bloch, 1999). Though seen as a challenge it can be seen also as an opportunity to extend the relationship with the family to overcome language
barriers by inviting them to share their language within the setting. It can not be expected that practitioners learn multiple new languages each year depending on the demographic of their group however a strong partnership with parents can allow for the languages to be experiences at both an early childhood setting and home.

Additionally, time is a factor in many aspects of early childhood education, including the development of strong relationships between practitioners and parents and families. Most often communication between families and practitioner occurs during pick-up and drop off of children (Kennedy Reedy & Hobbins McGrath, 2010). Identifying that practitioners and families have different rhythm to their days is key to creating effective communication (Kennedy Reedy & Hobbins McGrath, 2010). This can be a challenge as parents are most likely to want to talk at the end of the day pick up, which often coincides with the lowest staff numbers of the day and end of day tasks required by health and safety regulations. Early childhood educational settings must place an importance on the time families have available and prepare practitioners for end of day communication, as often preferred by families (Kennedy Reedy & Hobbins McGrath, 2010). A slight shift in schedule or routine may be a solution to meet the families’ needs, as a lack of time may lead to silencing of either families or practitioners (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). Silencing can create one-way communication that implies a professional hierarchy of knowledge and that other views are not wanted (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). With time-restricted practitioners they may only create time to give information of the day and not engage in a dialogue with parents and families. Therefore it is important to remember that both parties must be engaged and active in building the partnerships. A lack of time may particularly silence those who do not share the same cultural and linguistic background as the practitioners (Mac Naughton as cited in Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011, p. 9). Therefore even more awareness is required to ensure these partners are not silenced. Silencing is an unfair practice that is most often the implication of practitioner’s actions and words including: limiting non-professionals (parents/family) input, one-way communication and not creating a space/time for non-professionals to talk (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). With respect to diversity, early childhood settings must be aware of silencing practices and prepare practitioners for interactions.
Finally, a challenge in building strong relationships is stakeholders’ expectations of practitioner and family roles. This is a difficult challenge and may be hard to identify for those involved, as it is not as clearly identifiable, for example, as a difference in language. However, it is important that all stakeholders are critically reflective of their expectations. Cultural, personal and professional experience may all play a role in the perceived expectations on practitioners. Addi-Raccah and ARviv-Elyashiv (2008) found that some practitioners perceived parents’ actions and involvement as threatening. Though Addi-Raccah and ARviv-Elyashiv (2008) research took place in the early primary years in Israel, this perceived fear could be present in early childhood as well. A fear of increased power or involvement may stem from a lack of consensus on stakeholders role. This fear has been echoed across English-speaking countries where research is finding that practitioners are lacking and wanting more or further training on interacting and working effectively with families (Saltmarsh, Barr, & Chapman, 2015). In the same way practitioners are feeling limited, parents and families may feel silenced in sharing their own knowledge particularly of their children (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2011). The shift needs to occur in not only how early childhood settings are perceived but also how overall early childhood pedagogy is perceived (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). A change in understanding is needed to allow all stakeholders to enter into an analytic and critically reflective relationship together (Dahlberg et al., 1999).

2.2.2 Benefits

Though challenges may be present the benefits of a strong relationship between practitioners and parents have lasting effects. The idea of partnerships with parents has been given many names in early childhood literature and guiding documents including parent participation, parent education or transformative relationships (Thomas, 2012). Though discussed under different terms the underlying definition of Pugh and D’Ath holds true (as cited in Siraj-Blatchford & Clark, 2000, p. 98). A partnership with parents and families is an effective practice as it leads to the enhancement of children’s development (Sewell, 2012). However, within the Irish context “there is little systematic evidence on the prevalence of parental involvement… or on the benefits” (Share & Kerrins, 2013, p. 357). There are a few well-researched benefits of parental
involvement including better academic performance because parents and practitioners reinforce skills and provide consistency within environments (McGee Banks, 2010). Parental involvement may also allow for parents and/or family members to spend more time in the early childhood setting which reinforced the importance and high value of education (McGee Banks, 2010). A strong relationship between practitioners and parents allows for appropriate expectations to be set as well a mutual understanding of the important of culture, community, education and home.

2.3. Choosing a Curriculum

2.3.1. Introduction

There are many curricular approaches available to influence the pedagogy of early childhood practitioners. The following discusses the key aspects of an Anti-Bias Approach as well as other influences in curriculum about engagement and cultural appropriateness; children’s rights and universal access and finally diversity and equality education and its influence within the Irish context.

2.3.2. The Anti-Bias Approach

The Anti-Bias Approach is an educational philosophy based on the understanding that “all children are harmed” (Derman-Sparks, 1989, p. ix) either by being declared inferior by bias or by believing they are superior due to institutional privilege based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion or other differences. The Anti-Bias Approach has a vision that all children will be able to reach their full potential and that each child’s abilities are respected and given the opportunity to develop (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). This vision is based on three interacting themes: sense of belonging, engagement and enjoyment and child and family rights. To build this vision there are four goals for practitioners to work towards on an ongoing basis in the daily life of the early childhood setting. Diversity initiatives take time, its continuous nature requires persistency (Friendly, 2007). Mac Naughton (2006) also states “superficial or short-term approaches may increase rather than reduce children’s stereotyping and prejudice” (p.49).
2.3.2.1. The Goals of the Anti-Bias Approach

The Anti-Bias Approach is based on four core goals, which educators and practitioners should implement in their programmes on a daily basis. These goals are applicable to be used with all children and influence each aspect of the programmes (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). There are also corresponding goals for both adults and children within the Anti-Bias Approach. The goals should not be seen as a hierarchy or a progression but as interacting (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

The four goals are as follows:

Children:
- To support children’s identity and sense of belonging
- To support children to become comfortable with difference
- To foster each child’s critical thinking about bias
- To empower children to stand up for themselves and others in the face of bias

Adults:
- To be conscious of one’s own culture, attitudes and values and how they influence practice
- To be comfortable with difference, engage effectively with families
- To critically think about bias and discrimination
- To confidently engage in dialogue around issues of bias and discrimination.

(OMC, 2006, p. 9)

These goals are the building blocks of how the Anti-Bias Approach can develop in each setting. In 2010 these goals were rewritten to read as measurable outcomes. In the Irish context the original goals are used, therefore that is what is referenced here. The goals are also adaptable to the needs of each child, family and community (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Many children are growing up in a world where they do not have equal opportunities. The four goals of the Anti-Bias Approach are, therefore, globally relevant as a means of providing the necessary tools for children to address the challenge of inequality (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010).

2.3.3. Engagement And Cultural Appropriateness

The Anti-Bias Approach also has a vision to create a “process [that] engages all members of the program or school in joyful learning” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 2). To engage all members of the programme it is required that the diversity of
all children and families’ is considered and a range of learning styles, not a “one-size-fits-all learning style” (Brooker, 2005, p. 127) is implemented. For this to occur educators must be critically reflective of their own practice and beliefs (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Dominant early childhood practices may not be aligned with the child’s acquired learning and interacting styles (Murray & O'Doherty, 2004). For example, child directed learning, the process of self motivated exploration by a child in an early childhood setting, sets an underlying importance on individualism which is a core belief in many western or minority world cultures though may not represent the beliefs of all children and families (Brooker, 2005). A common response to this is the implementation of a ‘difference denial philosophy’, which is based on the false understanding that “all children share a common developmental context” (Murray & O'Doherty, 2004, p. 46) or in more common terms, we are all the same. However that may create barriers for children as it fails to create an environment where diversity is valued (Murray & O'Doherty, 2004). The vision of the Anti-Bias Approach encompasses the value that “all children and families have a sense of belonging and experience affirmation of their identities and cultural ways of being” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 2). The value of diversity is lost when young children’s awareness of difference is denied, though it is often done with good intent to acknowledge our shared humanity (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Murray & O'Doherty, 2004).

In addition, to the ‘difference denial philosophy’, early childhood education has “grown through a developing set of truths” (Mac Naughton, 2005, pp. 27-28). This ‘set of truths’ represents a false understanding of how all children should develop according to stages, goals and predetermined outcomes (Murray & Urban, 2012). As this set of truths often operates as a ‘regime of truth’ it creates the universal child and adversely creates the ‘other’ that does not conform to the set of truth; thus leading to many children and adults experiencing “inequitable and unjust effects” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 37) or outcomes. For example, the marginalisation of the ‘other’ limits the ways of being, thinking and interaction and consequently the engagement of children and families (Mac Naughton, 2005). Therefore, a process that engages all members can look different for each child and family.
2.3.4. Children’s Rights - Universal Access

Children’s rights are an overarching theme of the Anti-Bias Approach. Extending on the right to belong is all children’s right to “have access to and participate in the education they need to become successful, contributing members of society” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 2). The promotion of respect for diversity must also address the larger aspects of social inclusion/exclusion, as respect for diversity is indistinguishably to issues of social inclusion (Vandenbroeck, 2007). Early childhood policies cannot be considered separate from economic and social reforms to ensure that the interaction with different groups is supplemented by real change in accessibility (Vandenbroeck, 2007). A change in accessibility is to ensure all “children and adults know how to respectfully and easily live, learn and work together in diverse and inclusive environments” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 2).

In accessing early childhood services there are two contrasting views (OECD, 2006). Universal access denotes that all children and families may have access to a programme, though full coverage may not be achieved due to the preferences and needs of individual families (OECD, 2006). A second approach is a targeted one that only offers government funding or intervention for a specific group of children or a specific need (OECD, 2006). Though targeted approaches may be successful, quality universal services can also offer the same benefits and include all children (Ben-Galim, 2011; Bennett, 2011). However, when discussing universal access there are three internal factors that are often not identified including the conditions of access (free, fee paying, subsidised, age, etc.), the scope of free access (full-day, half day, traditional school year calendar, convenience for families etc.) and thirdly the kind of access (only one type of service, or multiple services, playgroups, after-school care, etc.) all three being important considerations in Ireland’s developing policies on access to early childhood services (OECD, 2006).

Ireland announced on the 6 of April 2009 the creation of the free preschool year developing a ‘universal’ programme over the traditionally favoured targeted approach for ages three years and three months to four years and six months (Hayes, 2010). This
shift in policy is reflective of the shifting of perspectives and the value for young children as well as a shift from a private responsibility to a public one (Hayes & Bradley, 2009).

In addition to these considerations of access Woodhead and Moss (2007) warn about the curricular focus of universal access being ‘school readiness’. This feature is already true in many English-speaking country that focus “on cognitive development in the early years, and the acquisition of a range of knowledge, skills and dispositions” (OECD, 2006, p. 13) or the broadly defined ‘school readiness approach’ as opposed to a more play-based approach. Still there is research supporting both economic and social capital benefits to universal access to quality early childhood services (Ben-Galim, 2011). These underlining economic and social benefits support universal access and therefore support the Anti-Bias Approach’s focus on a child’s right to access education. However, though access is important the Anti-Bias Approach makes it clear that access is just the first step. Participation within an early childhood setting is key to addressing the larger issue of social inclusion and respect for diversity.

2.3.5. Documents that Influence Provision in the Irish Context

Within an Irish early childhood setting there are diverse influences on how pedagogy develops. Within the Irish context there are four key international and national guiding documents that also influence pedagogy. These documents are the international United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and three national documents Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006), The Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (OMC, 2006) and Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Document (NCCA, 2009).

The first value of belonging and identity is interpreted and expressed in all four of the documents, though slightly differently and from diverse perspectives. Article eight of the UNCRC articulates the child’s right to an identity (UN, 1989). This article is aimed at identifying the rights of a child to a name, nationality and other more formal details however it relays the importance of identity to each individual. The concept is
correspondingly a key feature of both the *Aistear* and *Síolta* documents. As of March 2015 an additional resource is available to Irish practitioners in the implementation of both the *Aistear* and *Síolta* documents together, called the *Aistear*Síolta Practice Guide (NCCA, 2015). This guide assists practitioners in linking the two documents, *Aistear* and *Síolta*, in relation to their practice and professional development. The new practice guides outlines the six interconnected curriculum pillars. The *Aistear* theme of Well-being (NCCA, 2009) is linked to the *Síolta’s* standard one the rights of the child (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006). Whereas *The Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers* (OMC, 2006) discusses further the four goals of the Anti-Bias Approach (Section 2.3.2.1.) to identify how practitioners may support children’s identity and sense of belonging. Though the four influences may be expressed differently the underlying connection allow for the development of diverse influences of the curriculum.

Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC relate directly to children’s identity, article 12 states the child’s right to have and express an opinion that is considered in matters related to the child (UN, 1989). Moss (2007) identifies that democratic participation is key and “is a means by which children and adults can participate collectively in shaping decisions affecting themselves, groups of which they are members and the wider society” (p.3). If children’s opinions are a consideration in the setting they will ultimately influence pedagogy. This is the first component of the first standard of *Síolta* “each child has opportunities to make choices, is enabled to make decisions, and has her/his choices and decisions respected” (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006, p. 14). This demonstrates its importance; practitioners should consider the opinions and expressions of young children, as they are a vital source of curriculum. *The Diversity and Equality Guidelines* (OMC, 2006) outline the same importance however, go one step further and identify strategies of how to support children’s meaningful participation. *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) identifies children’s right to make choices however it is not given the same importance as it is in *Síolta*. Democratic participation allows many children and adults to influence the perspectives and understanding of the curriculum, which will then rely on the second key value of developing strong relationships.
The value of developing and investing in family and early childhood setting relationships is a key value in both the *Aistear*, *Síolta*, the Diversity and Equality Guidelines documents though this value is not as explicitly outlined in the UNCRC as it is not specifically an educational document. *Aistear* outlines not only the values of engagement with families but the benefits as well. With building partnerships between parents and practitioners’, which is the first of four themes, the emphasis is placed there to allow it to influence practice. The same is true of the *Síolta* guidelines. *Síolta* standard three: Parents and Families (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006) highlights the importance of formal and informal communication with families as well as providing diverse opportunities for families to engage with the setting and share skillsets (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006). The points of reflections identified in the Diversity and Equality Guidelines (OMC, 2006) also support practitioners in developing their pedagogy and make the changes need to engage all families. As all documents acknowledge the importance of parental engagement and relationships between practitioners and families it should play an important role in the development of practice. Related to both the child’s belonging and identity and engagement with families, is a child’s right to participate and be engaged in cultural, family and social activities (UN, 1989). *Síolta* addresses this aspect clearly identifying that a setting should support children’s memberships to local and national identity groups (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006). *Aistear*’s theme of well-being also addresses a child’s right to participate and be happy and healthy (NCCA, 2009).

Therefore, it can be seen how interwoven the UNCRC is with aspects of pedagogy from an international perspective as well as how it is woven into the three national guiding documents. As identified multiple guiding documents can enhance a practitioners’ pedagogy it may also lead to challenges. In the current Irish context there is no mandatory requirement to implement any of the three guiding documents. However, it is highly suggested that in particular, *Aistear* and *Síolta*, the key national documents influence pedagogy, therefore finding a balance of theses influences is part of the ongoing professional development of Ireland. Both the Anti-Bias Approach and pedagogical documents can be elements of this pedagogy. The Anti-Bias Approach (as
discussed above in Section 2.3.2.) and pedagogical documentation (as discussed in the following Section 2.4.) have overlapping values such as, belonging and identity, family and early childhood setting relationships, as well as specific guidance for the curriculum.

2.3.6. Diversity And Equality In The Irish Context

Within the Irish context the aspect of diversity and equality in education has been influenced by several factors. The first factor is a wide spread inaccurate belief that Ireland had been culturally homogenous until the recent waves of immigration and therefore a country without issues of ‘racism’ until recently (Murray & Urban, 2012). This belief implies that any issues such as; prejudice, discrimination or racism arrived with recent immigrants (Murray & Urban, 2012). Ireland, in fact, has been impacted by immigration since 400 AD and the first reference to the indigenous Traveller Community goes back as far as the 12th century (Murray & Urban, 2012). The lack of acknowledgment of diversity of Ireland throughout history may have slowed the development of equality policies. However, though Ireland was slow to acknowledge the need for equality policies in the last fifteen to twenty years and with a much needed push from Europe legislation and policies for equality have been developed and implemented at various levels in society (Crowley, 2006). Legislation includes the ratification of the UNCRC 1989, Equal Status Act 2000-2004 and the Disability Act 2005 (Murray & Urban, 2012). ECEC policies developed in Ireland include the Free Preschool year (as discussed in Section 2.3.4.), the development of both a national curriculum (NCCA, 2009) and a quality framework (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006) and the Diversity and Equality guidelines (OMC, 2006) (Discussed further in Section 2.3.5.).

The delayed acknowledgment of diversity in Ireland has had a serious impact on Irish Travellers. Irish Travellers have and continue to experience individual and institutional discrimination linked to their culture and this is evident in many areas of life including education (Crowley, 2006). The Equal Status Acts (2000-2004) led to an increase of case files for the Equality Authority in relation to allegations of discrimination (Crowley, 2006). Many cases have been related Irish Travellers’ being denied access to
primary and secondary schools (Crowley, 2006). With long term oppression and discrimination the health and well being of the Traveller community has been threatened (Murray & Urban, 2012). While policy has developed public opinion on Travellers has been slow to change with many people still expressing negative views often due to an individual incident with a Traveller (Coxhead & Mac Greil, as cited in Murray & Urban, 2012, p. 220). This aspect of the Irish context is an important consideration for practitioners implementing the Anti-Bias Approach and engaging in documentation. This history of discrimination and prejudice may create challenges in the setting, as practitioners may not be aware of their own prejudice or may have a fear of highlighting Traveller identity out of genuine concern for the Traveller child. Traveller parents may also feel unsure and concerned about sharing information or identifying as a Traveller (Murray & Urban, 2012). Traveller parents are entitled to privacy as any other parent. Therefore time and patience may be needed to build the relationship with Traveller parents (Murray & Urban, 2012). On the one hand Traveller parents may be trying to protect their child from discrimination and on the other hand practitioners need to be able to articulate why it is important to support the child’s identity within the setting.

An additional factor has been the identification of diversity beyond culture and ethnicity to include gender, ability, age and religion among others. These have been factors in the development of diversity and equality education in Ireland (Crowley, 2006). Though Crowley (2006) speaks of compulsory schooling these factors can also be seen as relevant in the development of ECEC diversity and equality education. Practitioners and families that are accepted among the dominant group in the early childhood field may form a common voice that can silence diverse definitions including those of children and families of lower socio-economic status (Cannella, 1997). This voice often represents the white, middle class Irish families as the ‘norm’ ensuring the ‘other’ voices are not heard. As a hierarchy may be formed it is important that practitioners be critically reflective and allow for the silenced voices of diversity to be heard (Cannella, 1997). The Pre-school Education Initiative for Children from Minority Groups (Duffy, & Gibbs, 2014) report found that 94.5 per cent of the City and County Childcare Committee survey respondents identified the need for training in equality and
diversity as moderately high to very high. This perceived need of training highlights the lack of confidence within the field of early childhood education in Ireland on diversity and equality. However, it also identifies an interest by practitioners to continue to improve the field and develop practices to respect diversity appropriately and understand equality in the Irish context.

A third factor in the Irish context is the media engagement in the representation of diversity and equality. Media can play a positive or a negative role in the fight against discrimination (Mac Gréil, 2011). For example media coverage of cases from the Equality Authority has supported a wider understanding of the legislation (Crowley, 2006). Media has provided informed opinions highlighting issues of inequality though it has also been used to trivialise equality issues and provide commentary on the backlash of its progress (Crowley, 2006). This negative role of the media causes minorities to become scapegoats or provoke hatred through biased and inaccurate reporting (Mac Gréil, 2011). As recently as April 2014 articles have been published with extreme racist hate speech and stereotypes in national media towards Irish Travellers. Though the publication was condemned by the Equality Authority, editors stood by the article on the grounds of freedom of speech (Hosford, 2014). The particular article on April eighth 2014, led other national publications to condemn the article and support Irish Travellers (Hosford, 2014). Therefore it is a challenge to address how media is influencing and informing the public on issues of equality and diversity.

Diversity and equality within early childhood education and care in Ireland is complex. Through the ‘éist’ project, Pavee Point introduced the Anti-Bias Approach to the ECEC sector in Ireland through a consultation process and subsequent piloting of training within the sector (Murray & O’Doherty, 2001). The evaluation of that pilot led to the development of the Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (2006). The ‘éist’ project also engaged and contributed to the development of Síolta and Aistear. Through work with the City/County Childcare Committees’ trainers were trained nationally to deliver the Ar an mBealach (2004-2008) Diversity and Equality Training developed by ‘éist’. The culmination of this work was the Preschool
Education Initiative for Children from Minority Groups (Duffy & Gibbs, 2014) where ECEC services received diversity and equality training and mentoring. The only national ECEC project to date in the Irish context. The state and the Bernard van Leer Foundation have funded this work since 2002. This training is based on the Anti-Bias Approach, which has been developed for use within the Irish context. Though the Anti-Bias Approach creates a vision of an inclusive society the practitioners must take into account the community and society in which it takes place and meet the needs of the current stakeholders in their settings (Wardle, 1996). The Anti-Bias goals are not static but adaptable and extendable to difference within each context (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). An Anti-Bias Approach enhances not only diversity and equality in ECEC but also quality as seen in the Preschool Education Initiative For Children From Minority Groups: Evaluation Report (Duffy & Gibbs, 2014)

2.4. Pedagogical Documentation

2.4.1. What is Pedagogical Documentation?

Pedagogical documentation is a method of systematically recording the work of children’s learning experiences, analysing work and invoking reflections with visual representations with stakeholders (Buldu, 2010). In general pedagogical documentation includes the use of observation notes, photographs, drawings or art, recorded conversations and video and audio recordings (Tarini & White, 1998). It may also incorporate the use of new technology to document children’s learning including cameras, video recorders, computers, computer software and scanner that enhance “reflective thinking and creativity in both young children and [practitioners]” (Hong & Trepanier-Street, 2004, p. 87). Pedagogical documentation of children’s learning can look different based on the topic or work the children are completing.

2.4.2. Purpose Of Pedagogical Documentation

The purpose of pedagogical documentation may vary within each experience, however there are four key purposes for which it is used within an early childhood settings (Katz, 1998). The purpose of documentation is key in identifying what the early
childhood practitioners, children and families understand and experience in its use, as documentation may look different based on topic but also its purpose (Seitz, 2008).

A primary purpose of pedagogical documentation is for children to gain more in-depth understanding from their work (Katz, 1998). As documentation is a representation of the processing of understanding and thinking it creates an opportunity for children to revisit previous work and move forward (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). Pedagogical documentation creates a point of reference for children when the documentation is accessible within the early childhood setting and/or in the home (Bath, 2012). As a record of events or activities both in and out of the setting children may identify their own learning development or history (Bath, 2012). In effect children become more reflective learners through the use of pedagogical documentation.

As children gain insight into their own understanding, pedagogical documentation also creates evidence of their role in collaborative learning (Schroeder-Yu, 2008). Documentation of discussions may allow for children and practitioners to follow how children and groups formulated their understanding of a concept (Kline, 2008). As documentation extends the awareness of individual and group-learning children can see how learning from one another is possible (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). Documentation can also identify relationships within the groups’ dynamics (Kline, 2008) that may be used by children to support their own learning and understanding.

The second purpose of pedagogical documentation focuses practitioners’ attention on the children’s learning and their role in the learning (Katz, 1998). Pedagogical documentation may also be viewed as ‘teacher research’ instilling the belief that early childhood practitioners should inquire “into some temporary state of mind and feeling in children” (Wien, Guyevskey, & Berdoussis, 2011, p. 2) as opposed to addressing curriculum with certainty. Addressing curriculum with certainty does not allow for practitioners to be reflective and adaptive to what is happening in the early childhood setting. This understanding of the pedagogical documentation is an important part of the early childhood practitioners’ research as it enables the practitioner to focus attention on the children’s understanding and to identify their role (Katz & Chard,
As the focus shifts from a predetermined curriculum to the children’s experiences and role of the practitioners more meaningful outcomes can occur from activities. With the practitioners’ attention on the process and development of the children’s learning it creates the opportunity for the curriculum to be reflective and allows the documentation to be a basis for the needed adjustments of strategies (Katz & Chard, 1996). Documentation allows for the activities or experiences to be revisited therefore strategies can be adjusted immediately but also later during times of reflection by practitioners. Additionally, an evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of activities can take place. The practitioner will also be able to identify himself/herself as an instrument for understanding the children (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). A common benefit to practitioners engaging in pedagogical documentation is that it may also be used as a tool for self-reflection to develop professional practice (Kline, 2008) in addition to the curriculum development. The practice of self-reflection plays an important role in the strategic adjustments of practices and strategies as it allows the practitioners to identify how their actions are affecting situations as well as other influences.

Additionally, pedagogical documentation allows for recognition of individual children’s development and therefore informed decision-making by practitioners (Katz & Chard, 1996). This understanding of the pedagogical documentation process by practitioners creates an environment where the practitioners may be more willing to co-construct and evolve “moments as starting, middle, and ending places for understanding the children they teach and with whom they learn” (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006, p. 397). Co-construction of knowledge is the engagement and involvement of two parties (practitioner–child, child-child) or more with the ideas of the other that results in learning (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). As each child’s development and interests have been documented practitioners can build and co-construct new knowledge based on the child’s previous work or understanding and therefore creating opportunities for further development and growth.

A third purpose of pedagogical documentation is assessment of young children’s learning. Documentation can be used for assessment purposes and to demonstrate
learning in a way that standardised testing and checklists do not (Katz, 1998). Documentation can be used to identify a child’s capacities without a focus on developmental norms and may also determine what he or she is able to accomplish through drawing on the environment and the people in it (Buldu, 2010). Pedagogical documentation is a tool that sees each individual child “rather than normalizing children against standardized measures and categorizing some as ‘abnormal’ ” (Moss, Dillion, & Statham, 2000, p. 251). Practitioners each have their own process that effects how they observe, capture, analyse and interpret how each child learns (Buldu, 2010).

This process is different for each child and practitioner depending on their background and therefore documentation meets the needs of children and practitioners; it is adaptable and flexible for the diversity of the community (Buldu, 2010). As it may look differently for each child or practitioner it is important that all stakeholders are reflective of the documentation, as well as engaging in discussions among practitioners, if appropriate. Additionally, pedagogical documentation holds great value in the assessment of children with special needs in an inclusive environment as it creates an authentic assessment opportunity (Vakil, Freeman, & Swim, 2003). Documentation as a form of assessment allows for learning to be viewed in multiple forms therefore “honoring and supporting children’s multiple ways of understanding” (Vakil et al., 2003, p. 190). The identification of multiple ways of learning is not always immediately accepted by all stakeholders therefore the clear pedagogical documentation provide evidence.

The final purpose of pedagogical documentation is communication with stakeholders about learning, activities and development. Pedagogical documentation is an important aspect of communication with families about the children’s learning and experiences (Katz, 1998). Practitioners are accountable to stakeholders and through pedagogical documentation children’s learning and experiences can be demonstrated (Seitz, 2008). Practitioners must move past the idea of working in isolation and discover ways to connect and communicate with parents and families (Gandini, 1998). The partnerships between families and practitioners are an intricate part of creating an inclusive early childhood setting. By creating an exchange of documentation between practitioners and families it introduces them “to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their
expectations” (Gandini, 1998, p. 70). With exposure to what is occurring in the children’s day, opportunities are created for families to re-examine their ideas and views and become more inquisitive about the educational experience (Gandini, 1998). A shared awareness between home and the early childhood setting emphasises the value of discussion and exchange and therefore makes visible the culture of childhood both inside and outside the early childhood setting (Rinaldi, 1998). A focus must be on this shared awareness and discussion because if pedagogical documentation is seen only as a method of informing parents it will likely only be used as a one-way communication tool (Foreman & Fyfe, 1998). Through a shared dialogue families can come to participate in the documentation process and maintain engagement with the overall learning process at the early childhood setting (Buldu, 2010; Krechevsky & Stork, 2000). As parents and families engage in the process of documentation it can becomes more meaningful and significant to all stakeholders. A strong relationship between home and the early childhood setting can be formed because of pedagogical documentation by reducing the distance between practitioners and families while overcoming common time restraints (Kroeger, Lash, Barbour, Burns, Mayer-Will, Royski, Russo, & Tonelli as cited in Kroeger & Cardy, 2006). This reduced distance or engagement may look different for different families however it will have lasting effects on the child and family (see Section 2.2.2.)

2.4.3. Factors Influencing The Use Of Pedagogical Documentation

Early childhood practitioners need to think beyond simply displaying children’s work or images to creating documentation that “invites inquiry about the children’s thinking and invites predictions about effective teaching” (Foreman & Fyfe, 1998, p. 245). Two key factors in practitioner’s effective use of documentation in an early childhood setting are motivations and attitudes, and time.

The beliefs of many practitioners about the use of documentation do not necessary coincide with the beliefs of the local authorities or beliefs of the community, which may place increased focus on formal assessment (Turner & Wilson, 2010). Practitioners are not the only influence in the implementation and understanding of documentation, but local politicians and stakeholders also inform the practices within
early childhood settings (Turner & Wilson, 2010). Thus the external pressures imposed on an early childhood setting may influence how pedagogical documentation is used and developed.

A second factor for early childhood practitioners in implementing the use of pedagogical documentation within early childhood settings is time. Often practitioners who are less familiar with the concept of documentation can see this approach as creating additional work and may struggle to find the time to do it (Wien et al., 2011). When beginning the process of using documentation as a tool, practitioners often document too much and are unsure how to make meaning of the documentation (Wien et al., 2011). It also takes time to develop the habit of documentation within the early childhood setting and a practitioner cannot master it immediately (Wien et al., 2011). The time it takes an early childhood practitioner to be able to develop the skills and habits needed to document children’s learning can be a factor in its implementation (Wien et al., 2011). In addition once a practitioner has developed the habit of documentation the reflective process with the children and colleagues as well as self-reflection also takes time. MacDonald (2007) identifies that though practitioners benefit from collaboration that time was ultimately a factor due to the constraints of the classroom and schedules. Though the study occurred in single practitioner classrooms the same may be true of classrooms with multiple practitioners. Lazzari, Picchio, and Musatti (as cited in Picchio, Di Giandomenico, & Musatti, 2014, p. 138) recommend paid non-contact hours for practitioners as a means of facilitating the use and processing of pedagogical documentation. This paid scheduled time may be part of the solution for the factor of time in the use of documentation.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The following chapter presents the methodology and research methods used within the case study. The chapter presents the rationale for and explanation of the methods selected and details of the process of data collection, interpretation and analysis. Furthermore, details of the limitations of the study are discussed. Finally the chapter identifies and discusses the ethical issues that were taken into consideration in the design and implementation of this study.

3.2. Aims and Research Questions

The aim of this research is to identify the factors influencing the perspectives and experiences of early childhood practitioners and families in relation to the use of pedagogical documentation in the Anti-Bias Approach. Additionally, the research aims to identify the benefits of using pedagogical documentation as a tool in the Anti-Bias Approach.

The research methodology of this case study has been designed to address the following research questions:

1. What factors are perceived to support the use of pedagogical documentation as a part of the Anti-Bias Approach in developing strong relationships between practitioners and families?

2. What factors are perceived to hinder the use of pedagogical documentation as a part of the Anti-Bias Approach in developing strong relationships between practitioners and families?

3. What are the perceived benefits of using documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach to build strong relationships between practitioners and families?

3.3. Paradigm, Methodology and Methods

This study is identified as an *intrinsic case study*, as it aims to create understanding of what is unique and specific in a concrete situation (Vasconcelos, 2011). This case study
is within the interpretive constructivist approach, as the research aimed to “uncover meaning and understand the deeper implications in data about people” (Somekh, & Lewin, 2011, p.320) as well as to build knowledge instead of believing knowledge is static (Somekh, & Lewin, 2011). Interpretivism identifies the social world as the context in which data can be explained (Hughes, 2011). The goal of such research is to develop an understanding of socially constructed and shared meanings and “re-present them as theories of human behaviour” (Hughes, 2011, p. 41). The participant’s true voices are what create valid knowledge (Hughes, 2011). Therefore, interpretivists acknowledge that the social world has already been interpreted by those within it (Hughes, 2011). This is in opposition to the positivists who view the social world as an extension of the natural world and as awaiting interpretation by scientists (Hughes, 2011).

This case study was based on the collection and use of qualitative data. Noffke and Somekh (2011) state that if a researcher’s aim is to share comprehensive understandings of characteristics of practice it requires “a stronger qualitative component to the data collection and analysis process” (p.97). Qualitative data collection is a method of gathering, recording and protecting the information of a community and can be used for policy or social and community development (Noffke & Somekh, 2011). Correspondingly, semi-structured interviews were identified as the main source of data gathering in this study. Semi-structured interviews allow for an exploration of the meaning behind documentary evidence and link elements through the progression of the case study (Vasconcelos, 2011). In addition, in order to explore the richness and consistency of data collected, a qualitative analysis of the pedagogical documentation of children’s experiences created within the early childhood setting was completed.

3.4. Sample

The participants were chosen using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is defined, as accessing subjects based on known characteristics of the subjects (May, 2011). Participants were selected on the following bases: practitioners in the setting had a minimum of one year’s experience in working with documentation and the Anti-Bias
Approach; parents/family members have a child/children currently attending the setting
or a child/children who have attended previously. Additionally, the preschool was
chosen based on its openness and willingness to engage in the studies. The site was
identified through its extensive engagement with the Equality and Diversity Early
Childhood National Network (EdeNn). The initial step was a letter of introduction sent
to the manager of the setting to gain consent to access the site and possible participants.
The manager was visited in order to provide further information about the study and the
rights of all participants (discussed further in Section 3.8.). Within this meeting the
manager suggested parents and family members that may be interested in participating
in the research. This meeting was followed by a letter of introduction/invitation sent to
each of the perspective participants. The practitioners and parents/family members
were then given further details about the study and the rights of all participants
(discussed further in Section 3.8.). Three practitioners and six parent/family members
agreed to participate in the study.

3.5. Data Generation

With a focus on understanding the views and experiences of practitioners and
parents/family members in relation to the use of documentation within Anti-Bias
Approach data was collected using semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis
of pedagogical documentation of children’s experiences created within the early
childhood setting. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the process of data gathering
to be focused. The participants’ responses provided the basis of interpretation as they
represent different perceptions (Vasconcelos, 2011). Based on the themes established in
Chapter Two interviews with practitioners, interview with parents/family members and
qualitative analysis of pedagogical guides were established.

The interview guides (Appendix G and H) included open-ended questions to explore
the experiences and perceptions of participants. The guides were also created to avoid
irrelevant data gathering as open-ended questions allow for a great amount of data to be
collected (Vasconcelos, 2011). The interview guide included questions on three themes:
(a) background (b) practice (practitioners only) and (c) experiences between families
and practitioners; experience within and outside the school (Family members only).
A qualitative approach was used to analyse the pedagogical documentation created by and gathered from the early childhood setting. The collection was guided by the identification specific themes including: (a) belonging, (b) identity, (c) representation of culture and (d) inclusion of parents/family members.

3.5.1. Pilot Study

Both guides were piloted after the ethical approval for the research was received from the Head of School of Languages, Law and Society in DIT. The piloting of the instruments was to confirm that the focus of questioning was correct and that there was sensitivity to issues and concerns. The practitioner interview guide was piloted with an expert in the field and fellow researchers, as due to the specificity of the case study, the context could not be used for piloting purposes. The parent/family member interview guide was piloted with a parent who has a child currently attending the setting but who is not a participant of this research study. The pilot study resulted in clarification of a few questions and an adjustment of the anticipated durations of the interviews.

3.6. Data Analysis

The interpretation and analysis of data occurred within two cycles. The initial cycle consisted of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded digitally and were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Within this cycle was the reading of interview transcripts for familiarity and identification of themes of the pedagogical documentation. With familiarity of both the interviews and the documentation data it led to the development of early data themes.

The second cycle was the thematic analysis of pedagogical documentation, which allowed for reflection and interpretation of the pedagogical documentation and created a layering of data. The collection of two types of data resulted in the reinforcement of meaning (Vasconcelos, 2011). The two cycles allowed reflexivity, a “major advantage of qualitative designs” (Edwards, 2011, p. 161) as the data was analysed continuously and not left until all data had been collected (Edwards, 2011). After the collection of all data a thematic analysis continued based on both predetermined themes and those that emerged from specific to general. All data was reviewed multiple times in relation to
the research questions and emerging themes.

3.7. Quality and Limitations of the Study

As a case study is considered to be “the study of the particular” (Stake as cited in Vasconcelos, 2011, p. 329) it does not aim for findings to be generalised. Within this case study a limited sample was used due to its scope and as this approach is in line with the requirements from the *Dissertation Handbook* (Master in Early Childhood and Care, 2014). As with the interpretivist paradigm the data created is ‘local’ and valid in very particular circumstances therefore also limiting the generalisability of the findings (Hughes, 2011). Therefore the main benefit of this study is not generalization but to optimize understanding (Edwards, 2011). The qualitative research process expects the familiar to be interpreted with complete objectivity (Edwards, 2011). However, research in the social sciences such as early childhood education is located in the “shifting networks of complex interactions” (Edwards, 2011, p. 155). To ensure credibility in the data created, and the study as a whole, the selection of methods and procedures has aimed to address any concerns. In addressing these concerns the data was reviewed multiple times and discussed within a professional context if any challenges arose.

Feasibility has also been a consideration and limitation on the development of this research. Individual researchers in projects with scales such as this case study may select what is in the foreground and what may be dismissed or given less focus (Edwards, 2011).

Even with the identification of these limitations the data and findings provide insight into the Anti-Bias Approach and pedagogical documentation as tools for family engagement and strong relationships.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical considerations with the development of this case study. The *DIT Research Ethics Guidelines* (DIT, 2014) directed the development and implementation of this case study to ensure reliability.
After obtaining ethical clearance for this study from the Head of School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences an invitation letter was given to the gatekeeper (Manager of the ECEC centre, Appendix A). After a discussion with the manager an arrangement was made to share invitation letters with staff (Appendix C) and parents (Appendix E). The letters contained the details of the study, as well as information on confidentiality and contact information. These letters also outlined the rights of the participants, explicitly stating their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Attached to the letters were question guides for semi-structured interviews for staff members (Appendix G) and parents/family members (Appendix H). By giving the questions in advance the participants were able to review and ask any questions. Prior to data collection all participants were reminded of their right to withdrawal, given time to ask any questions and sign informed consent forms (Appendices B, D and F). As an aspect of gaining informed consent there was an additional consideration for participants that were illiterate. To ensure informed consent all information and questions were reviewed orally with the participant by both the researcher and the manager of the setting prior to the interview.

Additionally, there was a consideration for possible risks to participants. Therefore all data collected was securely stored on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed after the evaluation of the thesis. In addition to this to ensure anonymity of participants as required by the DIT Research Ethics Guidelines (DIT, 2014) all participants are identified numerically to reduce the risk of identification.

Entering into a community as a researcher there are many ethical considerations; however, through care, ongoing consideration, identification of the needs of the community and an ethical research methodology an articulation of knowledge held by participants can be shared.

3.9. Personal Reflections

The completion of this thesis has been an opportunity for growth for me. I chose a path that led to a small town in the west of Ireland away from my few known comforts of Dublin such as peers and the university. Having never lived in a small town it was a
challenge for me to acclimate to the way of life. However, making the choice I did allowed me to engage in a piece of research I feel is very meaningful. The exploration of the practices and experiences has opened my eyes to the possibility of universal quality reaching across Ireland but also the importance of quality even in the smallest towns. The research process illustrated to me how a small setting can make a difference is a larger community one child and family at a time. It has not always been the easiest process and challenges have arisen, many of which were outside my control.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The following chapter presents the findings from the nine semi-structured interviews of practitioners currently engaging in the Anti-Bias Approach and pedagogical documentation, and parents of children attending the service. In addition to the interviews, the findings of a thematic analysis of the setting's pedagogical documentation are presented. The analysis of the data occurred through the identification of experiences and understandings of all participants. The analysis began with themes selected from the literature review and interview guide and related quotes and/or paragraphs were colour coded. The initial factors identified were use of time and resources and as the analysis continued additional factors were identified such as language, clear expectations, attitudes, beliefs and values. The findings represented these five key factors influencing practitioner and parent relationships including time use; resources; language; clear expectations; attitudes, beliefs and values. The final factor, attitudes, beliefs and values, is one that was developed after the initial color coding began. It was a factor that developed through critical reflection of the data and a review of key elements of particular interviews. Additionally, the benefits of using documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach have been identified under three themes, identity and sense of belonging, representation of culture and background and effective engagement of parents and family members. The third theme emerged and was added during the analysis of the first two themes. The perceptions and experiences of participants have been captured under the key factors and themes through the selection of direct quotes from transcripts and summaries of responses. Commonalities among responses are presented as well as differences. These factors and themes are then discussed in relation to relevant literature. Each participant has been identified by a letter and a number in the text, for example P1 represents parent one, P2 represents parent 2, E1 represents practitioner 1, E2 represents practitioner 2 etc.

4.2. Context of The Study

The following section presents the context in which the study took place. This case study looks particularly at the engagement of practitioners and families in the Anti-Bias Approach with the use of pedagogical documentation; therefore, it is important to
acknowledge diversity amongst the group. The information presented in the section was gathered through the semi-structured interviews in addition to introduction and ongoing conversations with the manager.

4.2.1. Preschool Environment

The preschool is located in a rural town in the west of Ireland. The preschool provides morning and afternoon sessions of three hours with 22 children per session and is staffed by three ECEC practitioners and one ECEC assistant. Of the total cohort of 46 children (three part-time children share one space) nine children have Polish cultural heritage, one child has Polish-Algerian cultural heritage, three children have a Bangladesh-Muslim cultural heritage, three children are Irish Travellers, one child has a Lithuanian cultural heritage, one child has an Irish-Mexican cultural heritage, one child is adopted from Ethiopia and there are three children with special education needs. Throughout the room there are signs in both Polish and English and practitioners know basic vocabulary and commands in Polish. The welcome sign on the door also includes many languages. Though an observation of the room was not part of the data collection through visits to the preschool it is evident that the children are represented in the physical environment through the use of a family wall, display of self-portraits, as well as a variety of toys including persona dolls which are reflective of the cohort of children attending the sessions. The ‘family wall’ is a representation of all the families within the setting using photographs. It is an active space where children can talk with one another about their families.

4.2.2. Preschool Curriculum

The curriculum in the preschool is a blend of many influences including the Anti-Bias Approach, the HighScope approach as well as the Aistear and Síolta frameworks. The practitioners acknowledge that there is no one approach that covers every aspect of their early childhood curriculum. The influences in the curriculum blend together to create their complete programme. Their aim is to meet the rights and needs of all children attending the service and to do that they draw on a variety of frameworks to enhance their programme. For example diversity and equality is the key theme in the Anti-Bias Approach, however this focus has only relatively recently been added to the
HighScope approach. Active engagement of children is a theme across all influences on the curriculum. Therefore, the practitioners are supported to work with the children through the blend of influences to meet the daily needs of each child and each cohort. With the blend of these influences the setting engages in pedagogical documentation. The documentation takes many forms including photographic slideshows, the family wall, group/project learning stories and the *Mo Aistear books* (individual child’s documentation book). ‘*Mo Aistear*’ means ‘my journey’ in Irish. The books are filled with ongoing documentation of the children’s work and examples of their engagement with the curriculum, adults and children in the setting. The Mo Aistear books are the primary focus of the documentation discussed in the interviews and are the main focus of the thematic analysis of the documentation within this research. The *Mo Aistear books* are compiled by the practitioners and are used and discussed within the setting with the children and then sent home for parents and families to add to and use as a tool for discussion with practitioners and children. Though the *Mo Aistear books* are the focus, all forms of documentation can be discussed in relation to the factors and themes identified.

### 4.2.3. Backgrounds of Participants

The next section presents the backgrounds of each participant.

#### 4.2.3.1. Table of Participants (Parents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant code</th>
<th>Year(s) of child’s attendance</th>
<th>Gender of child(ren)</th>
<th>Additional relevant information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Her daughter previously had attended speech and language services up until December 2014 and is currently not attending services and will be reassessed December 2015.

P6 is a member of the Irish Traveller community. She moved to the service with a recommendation after being unhappy with another service in the area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Additional relevant information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **E1**           | 4.5 years           | FETAC level 7  
Bachelors of Arts in Early Childhood Education  
(See Appendix I for FETAC levelling) | Diversity and equality module, pedagogical documentation  
E1 has completed training in the HighScope approach. |
| **E2**           | 7-8 years           | FETAC level 5  
in Early Childhood Education, working towards FETAC level 6. | Her experiences working with other practitioners has led to on-the-job training as well as more specific training through staff development. |
| **E3**           | 20 + years          | FETAC level 8  
in Early Childhood Education | E3 participated in the ‘éist’ pilot Diversity and Equality training for practitioners in, 2002. Following the pilot she implemented the work and in 2006 she completed the training of trainer *Ar an mBealach* diversity and equality programme and has since delivered the programme to other practitioners. She has trained and delivered Persona dolls training. She has completed no formal training in pedagogical documentation however has been engaging in and researching the topic for several years. |
4.3. Perceived Factors Influencing Practitioner and Parent Relationships

4.3.1. Meeting the Challenges of Time

As discussed above (see Section 2.4.3.) finding time in the working day is one of the most common factors identified as a hindrance to using pedagogical documentation in ECEC. However, this is nearly exclusively discussed in relation to the actual time it takes to develop and reflect on documentation by practitioners (Macdonald, 2007; Wien et al., 2011). While development and reflection time use is important it is evident that there are even more considerations regarding ‘time’ when using pedagogical documentation as a tool to build strong relationships with families using an Anti-Bias Approach. These additional considerations include the use of time between practitioners and children and the use of time between practitioners and families.

4.3.1.1. Development and Reflection Time Use

Interviews with the three practitioners identified that preparation time of pedagogical documentation is an extensive part of their weekly routine. Bearing in mind that practitioners are only paid for three hours per session of preschool, or contact time, there are many more unpaid hours in preparation and reflecting. The collection of the data for the pedagogical documentation occurs within contact hours, and is an ongoing consideration throughout the day for E1:

> Throughout our whole day, we’re very aware of opportunities for documentation so we always have little notebooks and our cameras with us at all times (E1, practitioner).

The raw data is collected within the contact hours however to make the notes and photographs into a reflective piece of pedagogical documentation for each child within their Mo Aistear book takes a considerable amount of non-contact hours. E3 shares the extent of that time commitment:

> We spend our weekends keeping up-to-date with this documentation and filling it in (E3, practitioner).

The documentation process and content is also discussed in a weekly staff meeting. At these meetings curriculum decisions are made regarding individual children’s interests and plans are also made to document relevant large group activities:
In large groups, we have one person recording, one person writing and one person directing the group (E1, practitioner).

In addition to the *Mo Aistear* books the practitioners prepare a weekly newsletter, which documents the week’s activities as well as notifying families of upcoming events. Early in the year slideshows summarising the week’s activities and moments are shared with families each Friday. This is aimed at supporting the family and child with their transition into preschool. Each of these outlets for documentation requires reflection and preparation:

*Initially, we will start off the year with slideshows. For new parents to transition into preschool can be a bit scary, those first days, a lot of the time, the children will be crying. So what we do is a little slideshow of the children engaging in activities and we'll show that on a Friday. So that at the end of the week, parents can see these are the things that your child was engaged in (E3, practitioner).*

The preparation time is so great that E2 shared they are looking for an alternative to their current process. In search of a solution that may lower the required preparation time, the practitioners have been considering new options for documentation. These options include an online component however due to issues of accessibility they are still discussing possible alternatives. Though E2 reiterates:

*We are reviewing our system of how we're actually doing it this year. We're trying to work something out that's easier for ourselves and still communicate and have a strong relationship with the parents, but we're trying to work on that (E2, Practitioner).*

The findings were consistent across all practitioners, highlighting that the time for preparation and critical reflection on the pedagogical documentation was an overwhelming consideration in their weekly schedules. However, this is a small portion of the time required to use pedagogical documentation to build strong relationships.

4.3.1.2. Use of Time Between Practitioners and Children

A second use of time is that of practitioners and children within the preschool hours:

*I suppose with the books once they have been updated we go through the book with the child during work time and explain to the child that they can bring it home and share it with their family (E1, Practitioner).*
In addition to reviewing the books with the children prior to going home the practitioners make time during preschool hours to review the books once returned to the setting as well. The practitioners then focus on reading and sharing any additions the parents or families have made. In discussing a particular child who was acquiring English as an additional language E2 shared that though the child remained silent for an extended period, probably passing through the Silent Period, a great connection was made through the use of the *Mo Aistear* book and the time engaging with the child:

> It was really amazing, and his mom worked really really hard, and when it came back in, I would sit down with him, and we'd read it together, so I'd read what mom had said, so he'd be laughing or smiling. He understood, but he didn't speak but he understood what I was saying. It was a great connection for him from preschool to the home setting and then back again (E2, practitioner).

### 4.3.1.3. Use of Time to Build Relationships

The third use of time required for pedagogical documentation to support building strong relationships is the time spent between practitioner and parents or family members. With an open-door policy practitioners are always available to connect with families. At the end of each day practitioners share highlights and/or issues that occurred during the day with family members. Practitioners also ensure that parents are able to connect or engage with the documentation and *Mo Aistear* books. The documentation may be more accessible for some families; therefore the practitioners ensure all parents are supported. E2 discussed how a *Mo Aistear* book was made available for a parent that was absent from home for a prolonged period, through photocopies of the book. Although achieving the same level of connection was not possible, in this case the practitioners tried to meet the needs of the family. There is also the consideration of language (discussed further in Section 4.3.3.) in relation to time use. E2 identified that some parents and families receive an hour or more support with the documentation books regularly to ensure comprehension and engagement:

> If there is a parent with literacy difficulty or a parent learning English as a second language we do offer to read through with them or after we organize a time for them to do that (E1, practitioner).

> For parents who have literacy problems we sit down and we go through the book, and we will write what they are happy with us to include. So the story
behind the child’s name, they will tell us and we’ll write it down (E3, practitioner).

The interview with P6 recalled her experience of this shared time, stating:

[A practitioner would] sit me down and explain it to me by face-to-face words. To make it easier for me to understand (P6, parent).

As the community of this setting is diverse so are the needs and concerns of the families. Beyond the issue of literacy is the family’s right to feel comfortable with what is shared. Therefore, parents and practitioners talk together to identify and discuss any issues or limitations. E1 recalled an example from the development of the family wall:

One of our Muslim families, because the mother wears the hijab and covers her face, were worried about bringing in the photographs, so we had a chat with them. We offered to take the photo for them with the mother with her hijab on and they were happy with that then (E1, practitioner).

Moreover, E2 discussed how the family history questionnaire helps them make connections and start important discussions with families early in the year:

From use of the family history questionnaire, we know of issues. If they felt uncomfortable with anything, we talk through it and whatever information they feel comfortable with we would, especially with the parents that are illiterate, we would fill it out and explain it for them (E2, practitioner).

Beyond engaging and discussing with parents and families practitioners ensure that opportunities are created to engage with the children as well. Parents are invited to share with the children their skills, talents, cultural background within the preschool. All of this takes time to schedule and organise. If needed, practitioners provide feedback to parents on their proposed ideas for sharing to confirm it is age appropriate, engaging and within a possible time limit. The documentation of these events also connects other parents with the idea of coming in to share:

The parents when they see another parent [presenting] they feel a bit more confident to offer to come in and participate in service. We have had parents who were shy about coming in, but when they saw, how excited children were when parents come in and celebrate their own background, culture and language, they feel much more confident coming in and they are now approaching us (E1, practitioner).

A final aspect of the important use of time required for pedagogical documentation to support building strong relationships is the time spent between parents and children at
home. E3 identified the importance of the engagement of parents with children in the process of pedagogical documentation:

If parents realise the importance of this work, then they will engage. And they have engaged. And we're blown away by the amount of work some of the parents will put in. Everybody engages at their own level. Parents have very busy lives. But again, they are given the opportunity and the feedback from parents has just been phenomenal. They're amazed at how much their child is engaging with us (E3, practitioner).

All six parents explained how the Mo Aistear books were important and used regularly at home. Many identified how they had been seen beyond the immediate family to include aunts, uncles, grandmas and family friends. The children want to engage with the Mo Aistear books and share them with the people important to them. Parents and families also use the books to learn more about what has happened in preschool. P6 discussed how the book has continued to be a part of her son’s life as they revisit it regularly and with pride. P5 indicated her daughter’s pride of ownership of the book and how it is an ongoing discussion between the two as to what would be added to the book at home:

I would've sat with my child anytime the actual book came home. I would've sat with my child and filled in segments. You know where it says, parents' comment the story of how the child got their name. Little different little pieces so I would've sat with my child and discussed (P5, Parent).

However, just as the preparation of the book takes time, parents need to find the time to review the book with their children and that it may be challenging at times because of busy schedules:

Just being organised as I find you take the books home and you are going to do it and something comes up and the book is at home for while and you still haven’t done it. You know, and it’s getting around to it. But when you get very busy, it’s just to get it done. It’s just to get those photographs developed. Or get them stuck in. That last day when [I was] going through it and I wanted to go through it with [our son] as well so then you have to sit down with [our son] as well to do it and then you have to remember his concentration (P2, Parent).

Finally P4 describes the process of using pedagogical documentation as a:

A constant interaction between [preschool] and home and that’s fantastic because you feel you’re just in the loop so much (P4, Parent).
P4’s description summarises all nine responses of pedagogical documentation as an ongoing, constant engagement of practitioners, parents, families and children. The amount of time needed to meaningfully engage with the idea of pedagogical documentation is extensive though all participants see the important benefits:

*The feedback has just been phenomenal, and that's what drives us to continue. It's just everybody benefits from it (E3, practitioner).*

4.3.1.4. Discussion Use of Time Findings

These findings show the practitioners share a common experience in relation to pedagogical documentation and use of time. The findings support the research that identifies ‘time’ as a constraint in terms of development and reflection as part of pedagogical documentation (Macdonald, 2007; Wien et al., 2011). The findings also illustrate many more aspects of time use when pedagogical documentation is used for its four key purposes (see Section 2.4.2) including communication with families. The time shared between practitioners and parents is a key factor in building strong relationships. Foreman and Fyfe (1998) warn that a limitation of this time or a lack of shared focus may lead to the documentation being a tool for one-way communication between practitioners and parents. One-way communication can lead to the silencing of parents and can instil a hierarchy of professionals over non-professionals (parents/family). Lazzari, Picchio, and Musatti (as cited in Picchio, Di Giandomenico, & Musatti, 2014, p. 138) propose a solution of paid non-contact hours for the development and use of pedagogical documentation. Paid non-contact hours may support some aspects of the needed time however the amount of additional hours needed may be an unrealistic expectation within the current economic context of ECEC in Ireland. Overall however, both practitioners and parents recalled stories of how they were mutually engaged and happy with the pedagogical documentation. Through the interviews it became clear the Mo Aistear books are a great source of pride for the children as well as the practitioners. Therefore, time being a factor is not a surprise, however the extent of the time used was a surprise because of the participants’ exceptionally positive experiences.
In addition to these findings regarding time, an issue that emerges is the consideration of children’s agency, which appears to be inconsistently addressed in the development of the documentation. The practitioners have limited children’s agency in their choosing of the material which is included in the pedagogical documentation, as well as how to include it. The children are given some opportunities to choose photographs or representations of their work for the documentation books, however this occurs irregularly. This inconsistency may be a reflection of the current situation where time is already limited. The OECD’s report *Starting Strong II* (2006) recommends the assurance of well-being and respecting children’s agency be at the core of early childhood education policy. Considering the ethos of the setting is right’s based the limited use of the voice of the child in relation to the compiling of the *Mo Aistear* books raises questions for practice. The children’s agency is compromised, as they are restricted in what and how the documentation of their work is presented. While E3 states that the children’s perspective is present within the documentation the practitioners work nearly exclusively on the preparation of the *Mo Aistear* books with additional comments by families. The children’s perspective is shared by using their voices through quotes and by their active participation in the activity presented however they do not always choose the photographs or quotes for the books and are not consistently involved in the compiling of the documentation. The absence of the children’s agency in the documentation process may be a very likely consequence of an already overwhelmed schedule. Practitioners, parents, families and children are already spending a considerable amount of time engaging with the pedagogical documentation process which is focused on supporting and building strong relationships that time for each child to choose may put an unworkable strain on a already constrained time use. The question is can this be built into the process now or might it compromise or constrain their current pedagogical documentation especially as they seek out new ways to document.

4.3.2. Resources

The second factor that may hinder the use of pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach is the cost of material and resources. All three practitioners identify that as their process of pedagogical documentation has developed and grown it
has required more and more resources. E2 identified that the additional cost of printing, photographs and extra materials is high and is under review for the coming years. While discussing this E3 makes an important connection to value of the documentation:

*Money, the terrible thing is, it costs so much to print the pictures but the benefits outweigh them in a big way (E3, practitioner).*

*Síolta* is very clear on its support of using pedagogical documentation within ECEC. As Component 7.5 states “the curriculum or programme of activities being implemented is documented and the documentation is available and in use” (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006, p. 60). An apparent omission in the *Síolta* framework for the emphasis of the use of pedagogical documentation is the ongoing cost. All three practitioners recalled the same experience in relation to the expensive cost. Cost is a second reason, in addition to use of time, which is leading the practitioners to explore new options in order to address the considerable expenditure. While Ireland is highlighting the need for quality practice in ECEC through the development of three guiding documents there appears to be a gap in that support. The documents and associated ministries do not appear to take into account the cost associated with improving quality in terms of human resources and materials for quality pedagogical documentation.

### 4.3.3. Language

Another factor in the use of pedagogical documentation is language. In such a diverse setting where nearly half of children speak a language other than English or Gaelic at home it must be a consideration. E1 recalls that the family history questionnaire, which is completed at the begin of the year parents, shares many aspects of the child’s life including:

*What languages are being spoken at home (E1, practitioner).*

This knowledge helps practitioners prepare and use different tools and strategies. Including having some:

*Basic Polish language so that we try and communicate with parents or if not we can ask a parent who has really good English to translate to the Polish parents so that they might be able to understand fully (E2, practitioner).*
E1 recalled that the parents have also formed a community amongst themselves and would reach out to each other for support with translation and communication. E2 went on to describe more ways in which language is a consideration in the development of the pedagogical documentation. They also use simple written English and photographs in the *Mo Aistear* books in addition to practitioners offering to go through the documentation book with parents and families verbally:

> *If a parent speaks English as a second language there are ways around it... It's about thinking outside the box* (E3, practitioner).

All practitioners emphasised the importance of families developing and maintaining their home language. The practitioners highlight this importance as the use of home language was encouraged within the setting. With practitioners learning basic words and phrases in Polish (nearly 25 per cent of children speak Polish at home) shows that the home language is important and respected. In addition to spoken Polish, written Polish is visible throughout the classroom along with other languages representing the community of children in the setting in keeping with the principles of the Anti-bias Approach. The children learn English through socialising and engaging in play, there are no formal ‘English lessons’, just natural development and ongoing use of teachable moments with individual children. A teachable moment is not planned but a spontaneous moment for which is optimal for a practitioner to share insight or build understanding to a topic or idea. E3 discusses documentation in relation to teachable moments:

> *You're listening to children's conversations. You are down at their level. You are waiting for teachable moments* (E3, practitioner).

A second challenge with language is parents who are illiterate or have literacy challenges (discussed in relation to time in Section 4.3.1.3.). The considerations are similar, ensuring the documentation is accessible through the use of simple English phrasing and photographs, as well as verbally exploring the work in a partnership between parents and practitioners.

These findings support the practitioners understanding of not only the importance of language to culture but also the inter-connectedness of the home and educational
environment identified by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Hess & Schultz, 2008) and the Anti-Bias Approach (OMC, 2006). The practitioners are open and encouraging to each child’s individual and group identity and the diversity of each family background and cultural context. Children’s individual and group identity and sense of belonging is supported through the connections made in between the home and the setting, the first goal of the Anti-Bias Approach for both adults and children (OMC, 2006). This link also demonstrates the practitioner’s understanding of the second adult goal of the Anti-Bias Approach “to be comfortable with difference, engage effectively with families” (OMC, 2006, p. 9). The practitioner’s active recognition, respect for and support of diverse languages is an example of how limitations can be overcome; as the findings show language is a key factor in how the pedagogical documentation is developed and used despite the challenges of multiple languages. This has not restricted the practitioners that ‘think outside the box’ to identify and address the limitations of using pedagogical documentation to build relationships.

4.3.4. Clear Expectations

Another essential factor to the successful use of pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach is the clear expectations outlined by practitioners. This is evident in all nine interviews to different extents. Practitioners all clearly identified their curriculum influences including the Anti-Bias Approach as well as their expectations of families and themselves. E3 states just how early this relationship begins to develop around clear expectations of curriculum content and the setting’s policies:

We're engaged with families and with children around the Anti-Bias Approach, even before they start. So for example, our information evening is where we talk to parents about the approach. I suppose the big thing is what I say to them is we can't do this work unless we have you on board. We need our parents. We need accurate information in order to be able to do that (E3, practitioner).

This initial meeting is held in the spring prior to the start of the school year in September each year. The importance of this initial meeting indicates the practitioners’ clear awareness of what their expectations are of the parents and families as well as what the parents can expect from the preschool from the outset:

Parents see from the very beginning, this is the kind of service that we are providing for the children (E3, practitioner).
With their expectations clearly stated the practitioners begin to engage with families. Engagement from parents may differ throughout the year and with specific families. The expectations are not a policy document for reference it is an ongoing discussion that evolves through the reflections of both the practitioners and family as an ongoing process. Parents are not pressured and know that they are only expected to engage to the degree that they feel comfortable with. E3 summarises the importance of the relationships they are building when discussing what is shared at the introduction meeting as well as her commitment to the Anti-Bias Approach:

_We have a huge diversity of children and we will be celebrating that diversity, it's not just about tolerating diversity. This is a service that celebrates that diversity and we can only do that if we have our parents involved. You know, we're setting ourselves up to fail if we don't_ (E3, practitioner).

The parents identified in the interviews that they were told of the _Mo Aistear_ books and their purpose and were asked to provide the portfolio books. However, when the parents received the books for the first time in the year the initial reactions were of amazement:

_Really I was, flabbergasted how good the scrapbook idea was_ (P1, Parent).

_I couldn't believe how much they actually do with them, and how much time the girls take to go and present this. They go above and beyond!_ (P4, Parent).

_Just brilliant, it made me cry. I was so touched at this it was just brilliant and also it exposed stuff that we didn’t know was happening_ (P3, Parent).

These early first impressions of the documentation help parents to see concretely the expectations and areas of the curriculum that had been outlined in the introductory meeting.

The findings show that clear expectations do influence the success of implementing pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach. Parents agreed that they were interested in responding to requests and engaging with the documentation and practitioners within the limitations of time. The clear expectation that their engagement was an important initiating factor, however seeing the documentation developing was highly motivating as well.

The expectation of recognising, respecting and celebrating diversity was implemented, which is recognised as a vital component in ECEC quality practice. As children and
families explore and share their multiple and/or plural identities and belongings the practitioners have created a safe space to do so. This is an area, which has been identified as a considerable challenge for practitioners (Bernard van Leer Foundation programme staff, 2008). Practitioners may limit identities due to the complexities of engaging multiple or plural identities (Bernard van Leer Foundation programme staff, 2008). The findings show there can be an initial apprehension for some families in sharing their diversities. This initial apprehension may be a reflection of parents’ or families’ past experiences and may be a strategy to protect their children from possible discrimination, for example, what is commonly seen in Ireland in relation to Irish Travellers (Murray & Urban, 2012) or for new communities cautious of sharing private information. It is apparent that through the use of the pedagogical documentation, as a tool to demonstrate the value of diversity within the setting, families and practitioners begin to build strong relationships based on the expectations stated prior to their year in ECEC starting. Janson believes that clear expectations of curriculum and engagement are important as connections are made by “jointly doing, thinking and expressing something” (p. 136).

4.3.5. Attitudes, Beliefs and Values

The attitudes and beliefs of everyone involved play a crucial role in the successful use of pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach. The practitioners make their beliefs and expectations clear from early in the relationship with families regarding their acceptance, recognition, respect and celebration of diversity (As discussed in Section 4.3.4.). While this is the case for practitioners, P3 discussed how she has experienced some challenges. P3 recalled that she struggles with the idea of:

> Documentation if there were materials used that were basically, promoting one particular agenda over another (P3, Parent).

To elaborate P3 discussed an experience that was challenging for her with her eldest son and the topic of divorce. With strong personal values on the topic she stated she felt she should not have to apologise for her views, followed by a statement of the importance of common values:

> Sometimes we are so politically correct that we can fail to say what we should be trying to build up as in common values (P3, Parent).
This idea of common values creates normalisation of one view or set of values that is in direct contradiction of the goals of the Anti-Bias Approach and the acceptance, recognition, respect and celebration of diversity within the preschool. However through the interview P3 shared her belief in the value of the family wall:

\[\text{The family wall is ok as long as \{the children\} feel they belong (P3, Parent).}\]

P3 also discussed her understanding of the importance of respecting diversity:

\[\text{I think that it's really important in terms of diversity to acknowledge that we can have fears about difference ... I think we are biased to think we are all the same without actually looking well no we are not all the same... I think that's really good that we can focus on difference and focus on inside we are all the same and treat each other the same (P3, Parent).}\]

The interview with P3 demonstrates the need for the goals and values of the Anti-Bias Approach to be present in setting, including critical reflection and identification of bias. From the comments made it becomes apparent that through the exposure to the goals of the Anti-Bias Approach and the diversity of the setting P3 has begun a process of critical reflection. However P3 demonstrates a common misconception ‘difference denial philosophy’ (see Section 2.3.3.). This contradiction within values, beliefs, attitudes, statements and actions is a reflection of the reality of diversity within Ireland (see Section 2.3.6.). This contradiction was presented in only one interview with such a small sample it is however an important representation of a reality within the setting. In addition to this contradiction P1 shared a sense of trepidation in the use of incorrect or offensive terminology in discussing the topics that are present in the setting. P1 discussed her experience in discussing the topic of skin colour openly with her children:

\[\text{...my sister she's browner than you because she would tan more easy. And I said, yeah because even when you have pale skin, there are different shades of pale. It gives opportunities for me to talk and hopefully not 'put my foot in it' because you can say things in trying to you can say things maybe the wrong way (P1, Parent).}\]

Both P1 and P3 interviews highlight why it is important to implement an Anti-Bias Approach and the importance on ongoing engagement and discussions with children and families regarding issues rather than addressing diversity through a curricular checklist. A lack of exposure is often an underlying factor in the fear of diversity. This
fear of diversity can be identified differently in both interviews with P1 and P3. The findings highlight that through the exposure and Anti-Bias Approach at the setting these fears and ideas have begun to be challenged instead of being accepted as the ‘norm’.

The beliefs and values of families also extend the use of pedagogical documentation. These beliefs can be on the importance of the documentation itself or of the topics and information documented.

*I didn’t realize when the first day I was walking over to that school that I’d come out thinking this way (P6, Parent).*

As P6 reflects on her experience it is possible to see the importance of the beliefs and values of families but also that through exposure and experience each family can grow and change with the process.

This finding is significant as it demonstrates the importance of not only the need for practitioner’s critical reflection on bias’ but also parents and families. Turner and Wilson (2010) identify that the beliefs of local authorities and politicians may influence the development of the use of documentation within an early childhood setting. However, within the context of this setting two of the national guiding documents, *Siolta* and *Aistear*, both emphasise the use of pedagogical documentation (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006; NCCA, 2009) and the third document, *The Diversity and Equality Guidelines*, emphasises the importance of practitioner’s critical reflection on potential biases (OMC, 2006). The political and formal environment of the setting encourages the use of documentation. Subsequently the practitioners and parents’ beliefs have greatly influenced the success of pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach. Pedagogical documentation can play an important role in critical reflection of all members the setting’s community. Attitudes and beliefs are not static and will change with time, experience and exposure to diversity.

**4.4. Benefits of the Use of Documentation within The Anti-Bias Approach**

The benefits of using pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach are clearly linked to the goals identified in the approach. Three key benefits are discussed below in relations to the interviews and findings. The three benefits are supporting
“children’s identity and sense of belonging” (OMC, 2006, p. 9), the representation of culture and background and effective engagement of parents and families (OMC, 2006).

4.4.1. Identity and Sense of Belonging

Identity and a sense of belonging are complex ideas that encompass diverse influences and can be supported or hindered in a multitude of ways. The complexity of these ideas can lead to practitioners lacking the skill set to support children and families. However, the participants interviewed shared an understanding of not only what identity and a sense of belonging is, but also its importance and how it is a focus within the curriculum. Through the use of pedagogical documentation a sense of belonging and identity has become visible to parents, families, practitioners and children. P5 discusses how the identity of her child is represented in the *Mo Aistear* book, and how her child can identify important elements of her own life in the book:

> That's me and my preschool, and my friends, my family. She has a story of her life, her journey so far, all the little happy times, and even in times that have had sadness (P5, Parent).

As the year has progressed many parents identified a growth within their children in relation to the confidence, self-esteem and as well as a strong sense of belonging. When parents were asked to share about how their child’s self image was reflected in the pedagogical documentation they acknowledge not only its importance but also the accuracy and details presented:

> Everything he’s going through and all the learning he’s gone through this year. He has come in full costume. No one will care if he is dressed as a king or bear or dressed as a frog he will fit right in and the staff will work with him wherever his interest lies (P3, parent).

> There's wouldn't be anything that she didn't do well on but she might have felt, oh I was shy that day and then she sees something else. It has helped her realise, yes I have shy days, but there are things I can achieve or things I'm good at or things that made me laugh or smile. So yeah, it has been good for her, because she is lacking in confidence. She's very shy (P1, Parent).

Throughout the *Mo Aistear* books are examples demonstrating strengths and experiences including supporting other members of the community and the children’s use of the conflict resolution steps.
In addition to the important elements of each child’s life being present in the documentation it is also a representation of the child’s voice. P4 considers it an opportunity for each child to use their own language to express themselves as comments and explanations are recorded by practitioners in the setting or parents at home.

Finally, all participants recognised the importance of a strong sense of identity and belonging within the interviews. Though the participants considered different aspects of identity and belonging all shared the same enthusiasm on its importance:

>I think that they learn to like themselves here. That’s all I want. I want him to be happy in himself. I don’t want him to be afraid that he can’t do everything. I want him to be able to celebrate when someone else can do something he can’t. I want him to not feel like he has to try to do everything. Or to try do everything that he wants or that he’s not afraid to try. I do feel that is what this preschool has done for [him]. It opened up the world for him (P3, parent).

> You want your child to be comfortable in a group of their own peers. You want them to be confident you want them to be able to express themselves (P2, parent).

These findings exemplify Awartani, Whitman and Gordon’s (2008) definition of belonging and the pedagogical documentation provides examples of how each child feels a part of and contributes to their community. This is an important aspect of the setting’s curriculum and without the documentation this evidence may be lost in the busyness of the daily routine. Though the findings highlight the presences of children’s voices and perspectives there is an inconsistency of children’s agency in compiling the pedagogical documentation (see Section 4.3.1.4). As Moss (2007) discusses democratic participation as the ability of children to “shap[e] decisions affecting themselves” (p.3), it becomes clearer a key aspect of identity and belonging may need to be considered and incorporated consistently in future documentation. The Mo Aistear books, and other pedagogical documentation, play an important role in the development of relationships for children as well as an overall reflection tool for each child’s earliest educational experience. Therefore, it becomes clear the decisions of what and how to include pieces in the documentation are ones that directly affect each child. As children will influence the pedagogy when their opinions are a consideration (as discussed in
Section 2.3.5.) an important aspect of respecting and developing identity and belonging is missing for some children in relation to the creation and compilation of the pedagogical documentation books in the setting. Consequently there is possible direction for further development of the implementation of pedagogical documentation. However, the outcomes and successes of the settings pedagogical documentation cannot be over looked. The process of pedagogical documentation is engaging, exploring the multiple and/or plural identities of the children and benefiting individual children as well as the larger community. Foundational to this is the dedication of the practitioners, which is clearly visible in the pedagogical documentation and through the discussions with the participants.

4.4.2. Representation of Diversity

The diversity of the cohort of children and families is multifaceted and leads to many considerations of representation in the setting. E2 discussed the reputation of the setting for identifying and address issues of diversity and culture, and how parents are seeking out the setting because of this. She continues to share that a starting point in addressing these complex idea is the correct use of terminology:

[Other practitioners may not] use the correct terminology. I think some people that are not trained in the Anti-Bias Approach are afraid; they don't know how to address some situations maybe that they just don't have the skills to deal with the situation. [Practitioners] just need the skills and the guidance to guide the children along (E2, practitioner).

As a member of the Traveller community P6 shares that her child’s culture is visible throughout the Mo Aistear book. For the cultural background of any child to be visible in the pedagogical documentation it must be present within the setting. Specifically, the documentation shows true moments, activities and experiences within the setting. For P6 she saw her culture represented in the photographs of her family, in sharing the meaning behind her son’s name and in activities her son was interested in. E2 reviewed with me the different ways in which the environment was set up to include everyone. The environment included representations of common items from the children’s cultural backgrounds as well as dolls and art supplies that are reflective of the cohort of children attending the service including children’s family structure and ability etc. Additionally, the family wall is used as a tool to discuss and celebrate the diversity of
the children and their families. E3 describes the family wall as ‘a living thing’. It is used throughout the year and demonstrates the value of diversity within the setting:

> My family are valued and respected within this preschool. It's something that's used on a daily basis. We sit around it at greeting time, and you will continually have children going up and taking down the pictures. We plan activities around it and make sure that everybody has the opportunity to take down the picture and tell everybody about the picture (E3, practitioner).

Moreover, an important aspect of the representation of culture is the pedagogical documentation of visitors, family members or practitioners sharing an aspect of their life. Not all parents and family members are able to attend these visits therefore the documentation allows for the discussions to continue at home as well. The parents of one child were able to celebrate Eid within the setting with the entire cohort of children. Many aspects of the celebration were included such as food and dress but also more intimate details. The child was able to share how and when he prays as a part of this celebration going beyond the ‘tourist’ approach to curriculum to allowing the child to share details that were important to him. Tourist curriculum is defined as “a superficial educational approach… that “drops in” on strange, exotic people to see their holidays and taste their foods, and then returns to the “real” world of “regular” life” (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 8). When discussing this particular visit P4 shares how much her child enjoyed the opportunity:

> It was great for them to see that there is a whole selection of different cultures and not everyone is the same as themselves and that they can join in and participate (P4, parent).

P4 highlights that it is more than just recognition of diversity but that the children participate and create their own meaning of what is shared by families and the guests.

Another representation of the diversity within the setting was the self-portraits completed by the children. These portraits were on display during the first interviews and then added to the Mo Aistaer books at a later date. The portraits were as aspect of the physical environment that encouraged reflection from those who looked at them. From the display it was clear that they were important to those in the room. P3 shared how they were not only important to the individual children but as a representation of the children and adults in the setting:
[My child] when she did her self-portrait she said to [a practitioner] you don’t have a self-portrait (P3, parent).

The child noticed and felt it was important that all the members of her community were represented and that the practitioners are a part of that. The exposure, recognition and celebrating of the diversity has led to not only its representation within the setting but important discussions about the topic of diversity. After reviewing a visit documented in her child’s book P3 had an important conversation about diversity:

There was story about a woman who was from Africa and the discrimination she faced [here]. [My child] said to her I know people treated you differently because of your skin...and then we talked about have you ever treated anybody differently because of their skin colour? And he said yeah I did ... but you know again if that woman hadn’t come into the preschool if she hadn’t done that workshop if it hadn’t been documented in the book then I would have never of had that opportunity to talk to him (P3, parent).

These findings, in relation to the representation of diversity are encouraging. Not only is the diversity of the group presented in the physical environment it is an important focus of the curriculum. Friendly (2007) states that this focus has the ability to impact both the children and families, while creating an inclusive community. The parents and families feel the impact of the settings’ work; a result of that is the relationships between families and the practitioners continue to grow throughout the year. Murray and O'Doherty (2004) state ‘difference denial philosophy’ is a common response to diversity; however, it is not what is occurring in this setting. The true value of diversity is not lost but explored, celebrated and discussed, as it is present in the physical environment and daily life, the pedagogical documentation and discussions in and out of the setting.

4.4.3. Effective Engagement of Parents and Family Members

A final benefit of the use of pedagogical documentation is the engagement of the children and families members. Parents with multiple children who have attended in different academic years recall how the pedagogical documentation books have progressed. The progression from a year-end memory book to a tool year-round has not been lost on these parents and the documentation has created opportunities to be connected to the setting. This evolution demonstrates the investment of the practitioners
for ongoing professional development and the benefits it has had on relationships. The documentation of parental or family visitors has had an impact on encouraging more parents and families to engage within the setting. Therefore the documentation of family engagement is leading to more families to be engaged. The importance of family involvement is demonstrated in the documentation of guests’ visits within the setting. Access to this documentation also creates opportunities for family member to be a part of the experience through comments and discussion.

If you look at the newsletter and you see a picture of the parent or the person that has come in it may not necessarily be a parent it could be a grandparent or a relation and you see pictures of that, it would encourage you (P2, Parent).

Seeing and reading the pedagogical documentation was a motivator for parents to engage as they could see the results of family engagement. It also encouraged children to ask their parents and family members to come in to the setting and share:

[Preschool] is just such a big part of his learning he wants you to be part of his learning and wants you to be involved... He’s looking at all the people in his life and trying to fit them in around his space. And [preschool] is his space so he wants the people that are significant to him in here (P3, parent).

In addition to encouraging participation in the setting the pedagogical documentation has created an opportunity for parents and family members to discuss and engage with the information. The parents write comments within the Mo Aistaer books on the information shared and questions asked and as such their engagement is extended:

You can write your own comments, and it just brings you into the preschool when you're not there, it gives you a great sense of peace to know they're getting on good (P4, parent).

Those written comments are also seen by many participants as an opportunity to begin conversations:

We also ask parents for comments on the experience the child has had so that we could connect with them (E3, practitioner).

The engagement of families was clear throughout all the interviews. Families and practitioners are communicating daily, in writing and through the Mo Aistaer books. In relation to the results of that engagement one particular example of how the engagement of parents and families has impacted individuals stands out:
What I didn't know, I wanted to learn. When I saw my child, it made me so proud of how he was and I wanted to learn. So I decided for to go and do something about it. So I'm learning now at the Travellers’ support group, how to learn to read and write (P6, Parent).

This demonstrated the incredible impact the documentation and the resulting relationships have had. P6 directly attributes the pride associated with her son’s Mo Aistaer book to her personal drive to learn to read and write. The positive impact has not ended there as other children in P6’s community have joined the setting on P6’s recommendation. P6’s recommendation to others in the Traveller community is not surprise. As she recalls an earlier experience at another setting:

If you had a problem, the teacher would have more tension for the child. In the school where we used to go, they'd say, "Ah, forget about it now." And don't let it happen again, whatever. With [the practitioners here] they would say, "Oh, tell me what happened and I'll be able to help you." And the child would be able to talk. And being a Traveller, and having someone treat you like that, that's special (P6, Parent).

The findings demonstrate that a two-way process of communication has been established through the use of pedagogical documentation, however it has gone beyond simply documenting to enhance and create effective engagement. The positive experiences of all participants come through clearly in the interviews. The positivity of responses and the highlighted benefits have confirmed personal long-standing beliefs on the use of documentation as well as further supporting Ireland’s national guiding documents. Additionally, all three guiding documents in Ireland recognise a focus on collaborating with families as a part of high quality early childhood education and care. Brooker (2005) discusses that in effective engagement of children and families a consideration of diversity is important. Not all families will engage in the same way to the same depth however, the findings demonstrate how pedagogical documentation has been an important linking tool. As the information that is shared by families is respected it demonstrates the critical reflectiveness of the practitioners in knowing how to encourage engagement. This is not an easy task and the level of engagement by families in this setting cannot be seen as ‘standard’, but as a reflection of the hard work by all involved.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This small-scale research was completed in a preschool setting in the west of Ireland. Its aim was to explore the individual and collective experiences and perceptions of a small number of participants in a select setting. The setting was chosen because of its reputation for dedication to both an Anti-Bias Approach and the use of pedagogical documentation. The dedication of the setting allowed for rich data to be extracted. The data gathering and analysis was completed in two cycles, which allowed for reflection and interpretation and created a layering of data. During the analysis additional strands of data were identified. The interpretive constructivist approach was used to analyse data about the participants and build new knowledge.

This research project was a product of a long held appreciation of pedagogical documentation within ECEC. Pedagogical documentation is a recommendation of both Síolta (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006) and Aistear (NCCA, 2009). As a recommendation of the State the limitations on implementation are often excluded from the conversation and the four key purposes are highlighted. The four purposes as defined by Katz (1998) are children to gain more in-depth understanding from their work; to focus practitioners’ attention on the children’s learning and their role in the learning; assessment of young children’s learning; and communication with stakeholders about learning, activities and development; however, no referencing is made to resourcing in terms of human resources and materials for quality pedagogical documentation.

Interestingly, the experiences and perceptions of the participants identified the recognised limitations of developing and using pedagogical documentation but the participants were also able to overcome these limitations because they understood the value of the 'additional' work and were also capable of thinking and working creatively by recognising and understanding the value of this work and in particular thinking outside the box. The application of an Anti-Bias Approach was the second influence in the development of this research project. In a modern and globalised world aspects of diversity are in nearly every aspect of life, including ECEC. Therefore, as it is a
consideration in ECEC the development and use of appropriate and positive approach are needed. An Anti-Bias Approach allows practitioners to meet the diverse needs of each child and their cultural heritage and background while be adaptable and not rigid to the Irish context.

Overall, the intrinsic case study met its aims to create understanding of what is unique and specific in a concrete situation (Vasconcelos, 2011). Factors in the implementation of pedagogical documentation using the key goals of the Anti-Bias Approach as well as other important benefits of the work being done in the setting were identified and highlighted. As the circumstances were unique the findings cannot be generalised however, it is a high quality case study, which could be disseminated to support other practitioners, particularly with the increasing importance of addressing the needs of diverse communities.

5.2. Implications and Recommendations

This research may have immediate and ongoing implications within the setting and Irish context. As the benefits of the use of pedagogical documentation have been documented it will be seen a source of strength within the setting to continue on the path that has been developing through the hard work of the practitioners. As practitioners and families are able to support the work within the setting it could also have an impact on policy development as the findings outline the limitations of meeting the expectations of the three national documents Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE & Department of Education and Skills, 2006), The Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers (OMC, 2006) and Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Document (NCCA, 2009). The findings may also play a role in communicating with stakeholders about the further resources, support and education that is needed to meet and exceed the expectations laid out in relation to pedagogical documentations and its use to build strong family relationships. The findings represent what can be done, however, the limitations of maintaining momentum if not properly resourced are also highlighted as practitioners are looking for new ways to do this.
Additionally, within the limitations of this research, findings emerged that highlighted the perspectives and experiences of practitioners and families that could be further explored at greater detail in future studies.

The findings show evidence of exceptional benefits to those involved in the use of pedagogical documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach including a positive identity, sense of belonging, representation of diversity and effective engagement of parents and family members. An important addition to future research would be the inclusion of the children’s voices. Throughout this case study the experiences and perspectives of participants became clearer through the analysis of the data, while emphasising the limitations and benefits to the use of pedagogical documentation with an Anti-Bias Approach. However, the absence of the children’s voices became obvious and necessary too. In any further exploration of, in particular, the benefits of pedagogical documentation an important perspective would be that of the child.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Invitation Letter: Centre Manager

Dear __________, Date

My name is Stephanie Sagmoen and I am currently in my final year studying an International Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care (IMEC) in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). I am presently working on my research project for my Masters dissertation. The topic I have selected to explore is Documentation within Anti-Bias Approach: A Case Study Exploring Family and Practitioner’s Perceptions and Experiences. The main aim of this research is to identify the factors influencing the perspectives and experiences of early childhood practitioners and families in relation to the use of documentation within Anti-Bias Approach through exploring the perspectives of educators and parents.

I have chosen to use a qualitative approach in the form of one-on-one semi-structured interviews of 25-40 minutes duration approximately as well as a thematic review of the pedagogical documentation created within the preschool. Therefore, I am writing to invite you to participate in this study. If you would agree to participate, I will request to interview staff members and parents/family members of children attending the service. With your permission I would like the interviews to take place in the staff room of the preschool or at a mutually agreed upon location. With your permission I would wish to digitally record the interviews so that participants views and thoughts are accurately captured.

Your setting has been selected because the staff and families have been working towards important goals surrounding diversity inclusion and this research creates an opportunity for some of the experience to be shared.

I have been informed that the neither the names of our participants nor centre will be displayed in any area of the final report and all information gathered will be kept completely confidential and securely stored by the by me. The information gathered will be shared only with my academic supervisor Dr. Barbara Simpson at DIT. I have obtained ethical clearance for this study from the Head of School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences. The final dissertation may be made available online at www.arrow.dit.ie and may also be available in the DIT library. The data collected may also be used for further publications by the researcher. It is intended that this project will contribute to your community of practice but please be aware that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

I am attaching a participant consent form and would be grateful if you would read this and, if you are satisfied with the details presented here, sign and return this to me.

Should you have any questions on my research, please do not hesitate to contact me through my email: steph.sagmoen@gmail.com or my mobile +353 (85) 840 8345 any time. I would also be happy to discuss the research project in more detail should you require this.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Sagmoen, DIT
Appendix B: Participant’s Consent Centre Manager

I agree for my centre, Curious Minds Preschool, to take part in the study entitled “Documentation within Anti-Bias Approach: A Case Study Exploring Family and Practitioners’ Perceptions and Experiences” which has been explained to me.

By participating in this study I am happy to allow Stephanie Sagmoen access to our pedagogical documentation and to provide access to my staff and parent/families to participate in semi-structured interviews of emerging data themes provided that they give their consent.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study. I have been informed that the neither the name of our center nor participants will be displayed in any area of the final report and all information gathered will be kept completely confidential and securely stored by the researcher.

The information gathered will be written up as the researcher’s master dissertation and might lead to the publication of an article in the future. My participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from the study at any time.

__________________________________________________________________________________
Participant’s Name

(please print)

__________________________________________________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

__________________________________________________________________________________
Date
Appendix C: Invitation Letter to Staff Members

Dear __________________________,Date

My name is Stephanie Sagmoen and I am currently in my final year studying an International Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care (IMEC) in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). I am presently working on my research project for my Masters dissertation. The topic I have selected to explore is Documentation within Anti-Bias Approach: A Case Study Exploring Family and Practitioners’ Perceptions and Experiences. The main aim of this research is to identify the factors influencing the perspectives and experiences of early childhood practitioners and families in relation to the use of documentation within Anti-Bias Approach through exploring the perspectives of educators and parents. Therefore, I am writing to invite you to participate in this study.

Your setting has been selected because the staff and families have been working towards important goals surrounding diversity inclusion and this research creates an opportunity for some of the experience to be shared. If you would agree to participate, you will be requested to take part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview, which will take approximately 25-40 minutes. With your permission I would wish to digitally record the interviews so that your views and thoughts are accurately captured. Additionally, access to your pedagogical documentation of children’s work is requested. I would like the interviews and discussion to take place in the staff room of the preschool or at a mutually agreed upon location. Importantly all information gained from the semi-structured interview and pedagogical documentation would remain absolutely confidential and securely stored. Neither the name of the center nor participants will be displayed in any area of the final report and all information gathered will be kept completely confidential and securely stored by the researcher.

The information gathered will be shared only with my academic supervisor Dr. Barbara Simpson at DIT. I have obtained ethical clearance for this study from the Head of School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences. The final report may be made available online and could also be made available in the DIT library. The data collected may also be used for further publications by the researcher. It is intended that this project will contribute to your community of practice but please be aware that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

I am attaching a participant consent form and would be grateful if you would read this and, if you are satisfied with the details presented here, sign and return this to me.

Should you have any questions on my research, please do not hesitate to contact me through my email: [steph.sagmoen@gmail.com](mailto:steph.sagmoen@gmail.com) or my mobile phone number +353 (85) 840 8345 any time. I would also be happy to discuss the research project in more detail should you require this.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Sagmoen, DIT
Appendix D: Participant’s Consent of Staff Members

I agree to take part in the study entitled “Documentation within Anti-Bias Approach: A Case Study Exploring Family and Practitioners’ Perceptions and Experiences” which has been explained to me.

Participation in this study entails the following: the researcher, Stephanie Sagmoen, conducting a one-on-one semi-structured interview and an analysis of pedagogical documentation. I have read the questions for the semi-structured interview, and been given the opportunity to address any areas of concern.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study. I have been informed that the neither the name of our center nor participants will be displayed in any area of the final report and all information gathered will be kept completely confidential and securely stored by the researcher.

The information gathered will be written up as the researcher’s master dissertation and might lead to the publication of an article in the future. My participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I have scheduled semi-structured interview for: ____________________

☐ I consent to the one-on-one semi-structured interview being audio recorded

______________________________________  Participant’s Name
(please print)

______________________________________  Participant’s Signature

______________________________________  Date
Appendix E: Invitation Letter to Parents/Family Members

Dear __________, Date

My name is Stephanie Sagmoen and I am currently in my final year studying an International Masters in Early Childhood Education and Care (IMEC) in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). As part of the programme I am undertaking research to explore how parents/family members and educators are building relationships within an inclusive early childhood environment that identifies and discusses difference and how it is impacting children, families and communities. Also to explore this idea of building relationships through documenting and sharing the learning and experiences of the children at both home and school. Therefore, I am writing to invite you to participate in this study.

What does the project involve? If you would agree to participate, you will be requested to take part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview, which will take approximately 20-30 minutes. I would like the interviews to take place in the staff room of the preschool or at a mutually agreed upon location. With your permission I would wish to digitally record the interviews so that your views and thoughts are accurately captured. Importantly all information gained from the semi-structured interviews would remain absolutely confidential and securely stored. Neither your name nor the name of our center will be displayed in any area of the final report and all information gathered will be kept completely confidential and securely stored by the researcher.

Why is __________ participating? The Staff and families of __________ have been working towards important goals surrounding diversity inclusion and this research creates an opportunity for some of the experience to be shared. The information gathered will be only shared with my academic supervisor Dr. Barbara Simpson at DIT. I have obtained ethical clearance for this study from the Head of School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences. The final report may be made available online and could also be made available in the DIT library. The data collected may also be used for further publications by the researcher. It is intended that this project will contribute to your community of practice but please be aware that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Consent: I am attaching a participant consent form and would be grateful if you would read this and, if you are satisfied with the details presented here, sign and return this to me.

Further information: Should you have any questions on my research, please do not hesitate to contact me through my email: __________ or my mobile phone number __________ any time. I would also be happy to discuss the research project in more detail should you require this.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Sagmoen, DIT
Appendix F: Participant’s Consent Of Parents/Family Member

I agree to take part in the study entitled “Documentation within Anti-Bias Approach: A Case Study Exploring Family and Practitioners’ Perceptions and Experiences” which has been explained to me.

Participation in this study entails the following: the researcher, Stephanie Sagmoen, conducting a one-on-one semi-structured interview. I have read the questions for the semi-structured interview, and been given the opportunity to address any areas of concern.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study. I have been informed neither the name of the center nor participants will be displayed in any area of the final report and all information gathered will be kept completely confidential and securely stored by the researcher.

The information gathered will be written up as the researcher’s master dissertation and might lead to the publication of an article in the future. My participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from the study at any time.

_________________________________________ Participant’s Name
(please print)

_________________________________________ Participant’s Signature

_________________________________________ Date
Appendix G: Question Guide For Semi-Structured Interviews For Staff Members

Background Information:

- How long have you been working in the sector?
- What is your qualification background?
- Have you participated in any specific Anti-Bias Approach or pedagogical documentation training?
- What is your curriculum approach?
  - How do the different aspects influence each other?
  - What is the significance of that, for your practice?
  - What significance of Anti-Bias Approach in term of your practice?

Practice:

- In what way is your daily practice influenced by your use of pedagogical documentation?
- In what way is your daily practice influenced by engaging in Anti-Bias Approach?
- How have you been able to use documentation and Anti-Bias Approach together? If so,
  - What have been the benefits?
  - What have been the limitations?
  - If no? why?
- What do you see as the benefits of documenting children’s learning in relation to diversity and equality?

Experience:

- How have you used the documentation with parents/families?
- Have parents been involved in the documentation process? If so,
  - Within the setting? At home?
  - How was this initiated?
- Have there been any limitations or concerns with engaging parents with documentation?
- Have you experienced any challenges due to your settings' involvement in using documentation?
- Have you had any concerns of any of the topics of the documentation? If so,
  - How have these issues been identified?
  - How have the issues been addressed?
- Have you experienced any challenges due to requests for information from families? If so,
  - What challenges?
  - How have these challenges been addressed?
  - Were you able to overcome the challenge?
- What kind of documentation do you do?
  - How does this relate to the Anti-Bias Approach?
- What factors have limited you implementation of documentation within the Anti-Bias Approach?
- What factors have supported the use of documentation in developing strong relationships with families?

Is there anything else that you would like to mention, that we have not yet talked about?
Appendix H: Question Guide For Semi-Structured Interviews For Parents/Family Members

Background Information:

- How long has your son/daughter attended the centre?
- Have you had any other children participate in a programme at the preschool in the past?
- How did the staff initially share the idea of documentation with you?
  - What was your first impression of documentation?
- How would you describe what documentation is?

Experiences Between Families and Practitioners

- How was the documentation of your child’s learning shared with you?
- Did you have any expectations of the staff in documenting your child’s learning?
- What do you see as the benefits of documenting children’s learning in relation to diversity and equality?
- Have you had any concerns with how the documentation was shared/presented?
- If so,
  - Have these concerns been addressed?
    - How? Why not?
- Have you had any concerns with the topic of the documentation? If so,
  - How did you first learn of the topic?
  - How have the issues been addressed?
- Have you had any challenges with requests for information for the documentation? If so,
  - What challenges?
  - How have these challenges been addressed?
  - Were you able to overcome the challenge?
- What do you see as the benefits of documenting your child’s learning in relation to their self-image?
- What is your understanding by the goal of supporting self-identity and do you place any importance on it?

Experience Inside and Outside the Preschool

- Has the documentation been accessible? At home? Preschool?
- Have you or a family member participated with the process of documentation?
  - At home?
  - At preschool?
- What has been your favourite aspect of the documentation?
- What has been your child’s response to the documentation?

Is there anything else that you would like to mention, that we have not yet talked about?
Appendix I: National Framework of Qualifications, FETAC levels

“The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a ten-level system (1–10) giving an academic or vocational value to qualifications obtained in Ireland” (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2014).