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Doğa Anaokulundaki Profesyonellerin COVID-19'a Yönelik Yansıtıcı Pedagojik Rollerini: Bir Eylem Araştırması*

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Makale Bilgisi	ÖZET
<i>Geliş Tarihi:</i> 07.05.2021	Bu proje, Ocak 2021'de İrlanda'daki COVID-19 salgınının üçüncü dalgası sırasında bir doğa anaokulunda işe geri dönen personele bir destek süreci olarak başlatıldı. Yazar, hem ekip lideri hem de öğretmen olarak ortamda, bu projeyi, dış mekân ortamının kültürünün ülkedeki en kötü zirve sırasında işe dönüşe nasıl rehberlik ettiğini belirlemek için bir ekip oluşturma ve yansıtıcı egzersiz olarak koordine etti. Projenin amacı, uygulama üzerine derinlemesine düşünmek için bir alan yaratmak ve deneyimden ne öğrenilebileceğini düşünmekti. Bu nitel çalışma, pandemi sırasında öğretmenlerin deneyimleri ve işe dönme yansımaları ile ilgili dört açık uçlu sorudan oluşan anketin gönüllü olarak tamamlanmasını içeriyordu. Öğretmenlerin deneyimlerini belirlemek için yorumlayıcı bir fenomenolojik analiz benimsenmiş ve destek oturumları sırasında takip eden üye kontrolü, cevaplarına daha fazla derinlik kazandırmıştır. Eylem araştırması, çocuklarla uygulamada çalışan öğretmenlerin yaşamış deneyimlerini rapor ettiği için açık havada öğrenmeyi ve oyunu teşvik etmek için bir savunucu olarak hizmet etme potansiyeline sahiptir. Yakın zamandaki İrlanda politikası ve finansmanı ilk yıllarda açık havada öğrenmeyi teşvik ederken, eyaletteki çeşitli erken öğrenme ve bakım ortamlarında kaliteli kapsayıcı uygulamanın nasıl uygulanacağına dair pratik rehberlik eksikliği vardır. Bu çalışma, Aistear (Ulusal Müfredat ve Değerlendirme Konseyi, 2009) ulusal müfredat çerçevesi altında ortaya çıkan müfredatın açık havada nasıl uygulanabileceğini değerlendirmede yansıtıcı uygulamanın değerini göstermektedir.
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Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

An Action Research Project Based on Teacher Reflections on Their Pedagogical Practice in a Nature Preschool in the West of Ireland during COVID-19

Article Information	ABSTRACT
<i>Received:</i> 07.05.2021	This project was initiated as a process of support for the staff team on their return to work in a nature preschool during the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland in January 2021. The author, as the team leader as well as fellow teacher in the setting, coordinated this project as a team-building and reflective exercise to ascertain how the ethos of the outdoor setting guided the return to work during the worst peak in Covid-19 in the country. The aim of the project was to create a space for reflection on practice and to consider what learning one could take from the experience. This qualitative study involved voluntary completion of a questionnaire with four open-ended questions regarding teachers' experiences and reflections of returning to work during the pandemic. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was adopted to ascertain the experiences of the teachers, and follow-up member checking during support sessions provided more depth to their responses. Action research has the potential to serve as an advocate for promoting outdoor learning and play as it is reporting the lived experiences of teachers working in practice with children. While recent Irish policy and funding promote outdoor learning in the early years, there is a lack of practical guidance of how to implement quality inclusive practice in the variety of early learning and care settings in the state. This study demonstrates the value of reflective practice in considering how the emergent curriculum can be implemented in the outdoors under the national curriculum framework, Aistear (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA]. 2009).
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1.INTRODUCTION

The third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic peaked in Ireland in January 2021 with a surge of cases and hospitalizations which resulted in a nationwide lockdown, closing all schools, retail settings and workplaces. Although the early learning and care (ELC) sector had faced similar lockdown in March of 2020 with the first outbreak of Covid-19, we had returned to practice in June of that year with sunshine, the optimism of reduced cases, and an easing of the restrictions. At the beginning of January, it was a lonelier place, when all other educational settings remained closed with only full-day care services permitted to open to provide care for vulnerable children and for children of frontline and essential workers. Government funding remained an ongoing support to subsidise staff wages during this time as well as specific practice guidance updated regularly from the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).

1.1. Purpose of the Action Research Study

The purpose of the study was firstly to create a communicative space acknowledging the challenge of returning to work and an opportunity for the staff team to reflect on their role. It also aimed to empower the teachers and practitioners to consider the existing supports within the curricular ethos of the setting and to identify practical solutions in minimising risk of infection and harm to staff, children, and families.

1.2. The Early Years' Setting

The research project is based on the experiences of fourteen early years' practitioners and teachers working in a nature preschool service in the west of Ireland on their return to practice during this time in January 2021. As service manager, and fellow teacher, I led the action research project with the staff team. Our childcare service, located in a rural village, is split between two settings: The Nursery providing full-day care for babies and toddlers, and the Willows which caters for children aged three to twelve years. Both settings have a long-established outdoor ethos whereby the babies and toddlers spend an average of 50-70% of their day in the outdoor environment, and the older children at the Willows spending 70-100% of their day outdoors. Both settings have outdoor classrooms and shelters to facilitate extended periods of time in the gardens as well as direct access between the indoor and outdoor environments. Weather in the west of Ireland is typically rainy and blustery during the winter months, with occasional frost and snowfall, however, the days are generally mild and the children dress according to the weather to ensure they can engage with nature in the outdoors in a meaningful way. Funding was made available to all ELC settings during the Covid-19 pandemic to develop the outdoor environment to facilitate the implementation of the early years programme in the open air. While this funding enhanced existing provision at the Willows and Nursery, there has been an established nature-based curriculum in the outdoors for a number of years.

1.3. The Curricular Ethos of The Setting

Aistear the early childhood curriculum framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009) is the child-centred, play-based framework that provides the basis for early childhood care and education in Ireland from birth to six years. It is based on principles that focus on the strengths and abilities of each individual child, the right of each child to have their needs met, and their families recognised and valued in the ELC setting by responsive adults there. The themes of *Well-Being; Identity and Belonging; Communicating and Exploring and Thinking* detail the holistic learning opportunities in a play-based programme, articulating the image of young children as "competent and confident learners" (Kernan, 2007, p.2). The aims and learning goals of each theme focus on a strengths-based approach that emphasises the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding of each child. As a framework, it has the flexibility to incorporate

elements of different theoretical approaches into the early years programme, including Steiner, Froebel, Reggio Emilia and Montessori, promoting creativity and imagination in the planning and implementation of the curriculum.

1.4. The Professional Role of The Early Childhood Practitioner and Teacher

The development of the early learning and care sector over the past ten years has seen an increased awareness of this key period in children's lives, and consequently the need for knowledgeable and skilled professionals to support and scaffold their development during this time. Sexton (2007) considers that as a 'professional', the ECT should have a specialised knowledge base and have a commitment to engaging in ongoing professional learning. She or he should have a degree of autonomy in her work which is guided by personal responsibility and a code of ethics. In return for this commitment to their work and their role, the ECT then should hold a position of high status in society and be paid well for their teaching and caring endeavours. Within the Irish context, there is ongoing advocacy for better pay and conditions for staff working in ELC sector, while simultaneously a call for recognition of the value of the role of the ECT in nurturing and educating young children. During the pandemic, there was a stark realisation of the dependency of the economy on creches and childminders to look after the children of frontline and essential workers.

2.METHODOLOGY

2.1 Rationale for Methodological Approach

This qualitative action research project was developed as a means of supporting the staff team on their return to work during the COVID -19 pandemic. Thomas (2017) outlines the value of action research in empowering practitioners to make changes and this project was about attributing ownership and control over their working lives to manage the challenges of the situation. Phenomenology as a methodology for qualitative research is firmly rooted in "complex philosophical tradition in human science", studying the concept of 'Being', what it is to exist as a person (Sundler et al. 2019, p. 734). It differs from other qualitative research methods insofar as the emphasis of the study is on lived experiences of the participants and articulation of the findings to capture their being in the worldly experience. The understanding of the phenomenon as their lived experience is about how this reality is experienced directly by the participants, which in this study, focused on their return to work in an outdoor setting during the COVID -19 pandemic. Heidegger (1929/1962) asserts that a phenomenon can only be unveiled ontologically through 'Dasein', a philosophical term meaning 'being' or 'to exist'. Dasein is related to individual humans and the distinct situations they find themselves in. There is a pronounced emphasis on the social dimensions of Dasein and how one perceives oneself within society, and how in turn, this perception of the self has an impact on the phenomenon. Heidegger also considers the importance of moods in our existence and the potential of our emotions to influence and alter the rest of our life experiences. Our moods play a significant role in how one experiences a phenomenon and interprets realities and experiences, which is particularly relevant when considering the contextual backdrop of this study. Heidegger (1929/1962) also considers how the 'big' question of life and death, and one's willingness to face one's certain eventuality, influences how one approaches different experiences and phenomenon in life. This application of understanding of Dasein is universal and is argued here as particularly relevant to the study of early childhood teachers' experiences in the contextual reality of their professional role working in the frontline during a global pandemic. Frechette et al. (2020) summarise the objective of interpretative phenomenology in this regard as attempting "to uncover or disclose a phenomenon by pulling away layers of forgetfulness or hiddenness that are present in our everyday existence" (p. 2). The epistemology of this research is anchored in this understanding of Dasein and how engagement with the phenomenon and conversations around that experience uncover the realities for participants, that they may have hidden or forgotten in the routines of professional and personal lives. McManus-Holroyd (2007) recognises the opportunity for hermeneutic understanding when individuals undergo experiences that disrupt the ordinary patterns of life or "taken for granted aspects of existence" (p. 2).

2.2 Data Collection

Data was collected through a questionnaire which was emailed to all team members, with over 90% engagement with the reflective process. The low number of children in attendance during the early weeks in January and February enabled the staff team to work in rotation within their 'pods' of children and from home

on alternate days. This facilitated time to engage with the questionnaire and consider their responses to the questions. The initial data collection process was designed as a support mechanism for the staff team, and on consideration of the responses, this developed into a more proactive project in reflecting on the environment and their pedagogical practices. Consent was obtained from all participants to incorporate their contributions to the reporting and interpretation of the findings for this study, with each being attributed by a number for reporting purposes.

2.3 Data Analysis

Interpretative hermeneutic phenomenology (IHP) offers flexibility in its approach to adapt the analysis process in accordance with the research needs in interpreting the phenomenon (McManus-Holroyd, 2007; Smith 2004). I use the term ‘analysis’ tentatively in the phenomenological sense as it has been argued that this term refers to a ‘breaking into parts’, which creates a conflict with the holistic idea of this approach (Groenewald 2004). Groenewald (2004, p. 49) refers to the process as the “explication of the data”, which instead investigates the constituents of that experience within the context of the whole. Interpretative phenomenology requires that the researcher is not only describing the phenomenon from the participants’ perspective, but also that one interprets and finds meaning within these life-world experiences. The analysis of data in IHP always begins with the researcher as the interpreter, reflecting on one’s fore-projections or pre-understandings of one’s knowledge and assumptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Gadamer 2004; Heidegger 1929/1962). McManus-Holroyd (2007) describes this as “an art of understanding”, that necessitates the continual reflexivity within the hermeneutic cycle throughout the research process. Ricoeur (2016) explains the process of analysis in IHP is about listening to the stories of the participants while simultaneously realising that their meanings do not dissolve our own understandings, rather that our horizons of perspective move and shift throughout the research process, in coexistence with the horizons of the participants. This is what Gadamer (2004) explains as the fusion of horizon in hermeneutics, which creates an ongoing reflective cycle of understanding as new meanings are uncovered and explained. This reflective cycle on how the staff team perceived and demonstrated their experiences on returning to work was documented in part throughout my journaling process, a key feature of IHP, which supported reflexivity and an awareness of my own biases on the phenomenon and the contextual realities. This journaling provided space to question and consider elements of the ‘lived experiences’ as it appeared to me as my horizons of understandings shifted throughout the research process. Both Heidegger (1929/1962) and Gadamer (2004) argue that true understanding of a phenomenon involves this dialogue between the participants’ dialogue and experiences, and also the personal and professional context of the researcher.

This study incorporated thematic analysis to identify and understand meaning-oriented themes within the data guided by the revised framework of Braun and Clarke (2021). In thematic analysis, this guides the way in which one can organise meanings into patterns, from which themes can emerge to form a meaningful wholeness and contributing to robust research findings. In interpretative phenomenological research, themes are not determined by frequency in the data, but rather by the meaning attributed to these. (Bredmar, 2020; Laletas et al., 2017; Maxwell et al., 2020). The analysis of the teachers’ responses involved my interpretation as researcher and the subsequent engagement with literature and policy to create a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, that of their work in the outdoor early learning and care setting during the pandemic.

3. FINDINGS

The four semi-structured questions asked specifically about teachers’ feelings on returning to work during the pandemic; how the existing outdoor provision influenced their pedagogical practice and perspectives; considerations of any positive changes to routines or practices that they would like to maintain in the future; and a general question about their learning from this whole experience. In accordance with the phenomenological principles underpinning the study, the analysis was not a linear process in summarising the specific responses for each question and instead are presented here under broad headings to capture the essence of their ‘lived experiences’ at this time.

“They are all ‘my’ children” (P3)

Eatough and Smith (2017) speak of the ‘gem’ in interpretative phenomenological analysis, that which may be a singular remark that enhances understanding of the lived experiences of participants. In this study, that ‘gem’ was evidenced in the empathy illustrated for children and families, despite the risk of infection to the teachers themselves and a sense of responsibility in caring for them. Ten of the fourteen responses demonstrated a

clear child-centred perspective on returning to work, with an emphasis on their role in providing a safe and stimulating environment for the children in the preschool environment. The respectful regard for the child in the ELC setting is at the heart of quality and inclusive practice (Skehill, 2021; Sorin, 2005; NCCA, 2015) and this is evidenced in the rights-based perspective that recognises the “importance of having the creche opened just so kids have a place to go to and enjoy playing with other kids and learning new activities” (P4). A relational pedagogy focuses on interactions with all of the children, in a respectful and considerate manner, to which Noddings (2012) attributes her care theory that those who are cared for by others in a genuine and sensitive manner, will in turn develop this empathy and such caring virtues. The teachers model this caring behaviour in asserting that “our services were needed by the children most importantly, and their families” (P6). Taggart (2011; 2016) advocates for the ELC sector to place more value on this caring element and emphasises the importance of “reconceptualising practice within a political ethic”, in order to “champion ‘caring’ as a sustainable element of professional work, expressed not only in maternal, dyadic key working but in advocacy for care as a social principle” (2011, p. 94). The COVID -19 pandemic has certainly brought an awareness of the necessity of childcare to maintain the social equilibrium and this reality is recognised by the teachers here noting that one “felt a sense of pride to be classed as a front-line worker and as being an important part of these children’s care and a reliable support to their families” (P7). This “emotional labour” that Taggart (2011, p. 97) speaks, is a recognition of the kind of caring that comes from effort rather than instinct and is often only evident when it is not done. This nurturing, respectful pedagogical approach when working with young children is that which a quality service is built upon. The attitudes and perspectives of the adult working with young children and their families constitute the foundation of the early years programme, and so leads to that commitment to creating a space where children want to be.

“The possibilities are endless” (P11)

Notwithstanding the fact that the setting has a long-established outdoor ethos, all participants expressed their view that the children were happier in the outdoor environment, with the majority recognising that the virus is less transmittable in the outdoors. Despite the realities of the winter weather in the west of Ireland, this issue was mentioned by only two of the teachers, with the majority of responses illustrating an easy confidence in the way they work noting that “the children are happier when in the outdoors” (P5) and that they “love being outside and going for walks” (P2). The recognition that “the natural environment has a positive impact on the children” (P13) is stated with the confidence of knowledge and experience which resonates with Young, Haas and McGown’s (2010) understanding of brain patterning in nature engagement. Sustained focus and engagement with nature create these patterns of perceptions and behaviours, which in turn determine our actions and beliefs.

Young et al. (2010) discuss how one’s cultural gaze influences attitudes and behaviours, which is particularly relevant in consideration of the potential of support accessible in the natural world rather than to be overwhelmed with the impact of the pandemic. Teachers commented on the existing structures in place, including the “inviting areas for children” and the “wonder and awe it created in the children and curiosity that came from that” (P1). Nine out of the fourteen participants noted an awareness of the value of the outdoor environment in promoting the holistic development of the children. Louv (2010, p. 49), a long-serving advocate of outdoor play and learning, sees nature as a “healing balm for the emotional hardships in a child’s life” and this is particularly relevant as we navigate this journey through the pandemic. There is a sad realisation that this may “impact children more than we think” (P6), but simultaneously confidence in the existing curriculum in place in the outdoor environment to support children and families. There is an awareness of the benefit of having “organised interest areas and provocations for children to engage with” (P3) as well as having sheltered areas in the gardens for children’s comfort and enjoyment.

The practicalities of meaningful engagement in the outdoors are referenced in relation to the accessibility to toilets and changing facilities, as well as the ease of access between the indoor and outdoor environments. The *Universal Design Guidelines* for ELC settings (Grey et al., 2019) note the importance of creating spaces that work for those who use them, and this is referenced by the staff team as key to their ability to engage with the outdoors for sustained and prolonged periods of time. The physical layout of the environment is reflective of the teacher’s image of the child and their view of the child as a ‘competent and confident’ learner (NCCA, 2009; 2015) and is reported in the findings regarding the aesthetic provocations for play and engagement in the gardens. Grace et al. (2018) argue for a learning environment that supports communication and developing friendships, which Jarman (2015) describes as a ‘communication friendly spaces approach’. He considers the combination of the physical environment, the available resources and the role of the adult within that setting, as central to promoting the holistic development of the child in the inclusive ELC setting. The findings illustrate

the confidence of the staff members in recognising the pedagogical principles that underpin their practice in creating spaces for “meaningful connections” with and between the children.

“Built good relationships with our families and have mutual respect for our overall welfare of staff, children and their families” (P2).

The importance of cultivating positive relationships with parents in the ELC setting has been recognised as a key feature of quality education and care (Graham 2017; O’Byrne 2018) and over half of the participants in this project reflected on how to overcome new challenges of building and maintaining these relationships in light of the Level 5 restrictions. The teachers noted the success of initiatives to support transitions in the outdoors which facilitated an ease of communication and interaction whereby parents were afforded time and space during drop-off and collection time to settle their child, to talk with the key worker, recognising “the importance of our interactions with families here for those working from home. We might be the only social interactions they see in that day or week – the difference a smile of chat could make to an individual” (P3). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bioecological systems emphasise the importance of the environment that the child lives in, and the interactions within and between the people who inhabit those systems as relevant to the child’s development. Collaboration with key people in the child’s life and recognising the value of these interactions to support the child’s holistic development, is particularly relevant in the ELC sector (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

“I have surprised myself...” (P1)

Rix (2011) emphasises the value of supporting reflective practice in the ELC setting by encouraging the early years teacher and practitioner to reflect on how one might position oneself in the dominant culture of the “normalising society” (p. 79), and how one’s identity, and subsequently the identity of others, is created in the context of relationships and structures in society. He sees reflective practice as “developing a deeper understanding of your own views and ways of working and behaving, the context in which you are operating, and the perspective of others” (Rix 2011, p. 81). Similar to a recent study carried out by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood [CREC] (Pascal 2021), the teachers here presented a renewed enthusiasm and confidence in the outdoor environment and their role in supporting children and families at this time. The participants talk about their own resilience and positivity in facing this adversity, reflecting on the value of connections with others, and the simple pleasure of these social interactions. Like the CREC study (2021), the professionalism and dedication of the team in continued to come to work, putting the wellbeing of the children and families to the fore, demonstrates the strength and deep commitment to their work and to each other within the team. The goals of this action research project were achieved in providing a reflective process to enable the staff team to face the reality of the situation, consider what the protective factors within the working environment were, and what other changes we might make to further our pedagogical practice while simultaneously keeping safe.

“The slower pace of life has taught me to enjoy and appreciate quality time both at home and at work” (P14)

Action research is about developing practice from the ground, considering what is working well, and what changes can be made. Lewin (1947) talks of this process of being a change agent in practice, and this questionnaire facilitated communication of ideas as a foundation for developing pedagogical and professional practice. It is argued here that the professional identity of the adult working in the ELC setting is embedded in the culture of the setting and of the community in which they are situated. The engagement with this reflective action research project has resulted in practical and proactive recommendations for change and development. All participants commented on the ease of cleaning routines when children spend the majority of their time in the outdoors. This facilitated team members to ensure the indoor rooms were cleaned and disinfected as required without disturbing children or creating a heightened anxiety around this. The fact that there has been minimal sickness within the service over the past year was communicated as a valid reason for maintaining the existing cleaning and sanitising routines, as well as strict adherence to the policy of exclusion for any illnesses. These actions are seen as central to children’s health and well-being and are recognised in the findings as central to an inclusive early years’ curriculum to ensure children are facilitated to participate in the preschool programme. There was also an acknowledgment of the impact of transitioning in the outdoors on maintaining a safe environment and equally as important, of supporting positive interactions with children and families. These assumptions are supported in contemporary research as reported in the Irish media (McGreevy, 2021) whereby outdoor transmission of COVID-19 account for only 0.1% of the state’s cases. The outdoor sheltered areas at both premises facilitate a safer space for transitioning in and out of the settings and are also recognised as a key communicative space in having a slow and easy handover. Interest areas and provocations

for play establish these spaces as an engaging place for the children while they say goodbye to parents and has resulted in a more informed and considerate approach in creating stimulating and aesthetic environments for children.

The opening hours for the setting had been adapted at the beginning of the pandemic, reducing service for half an hour at either end of the day, so now operating from 8:00am to 5:30pm. This was changed to facilitate the 'pod' system in ensuring the same two staff members could care for a group of children thereby minimising risk of infection by mixing pods during the day. This new system has been identified by some team members as having a positive impact on their well-being, resulting in feeling more "motivated" and also noting the benefits for the children in having that little bit of extra time with parents at the end of the day. Team members also commented on the value of being facilitated in having time to work from home, support from colleagues and management, support with childcare at the settings and flexibility in the working day to promote their well-being at this time.

4.RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding the challenges of working in practice at this time, from worries about oneself and one's family during this third wave of COVID-19; balancing home-life and childcare; supporting one's children with home-schooling, this action research project illustrated the potential of learning from this experience. Reflective practice in the early years setting can have real impact on pedagogical practice and perceptions of our work in practice (Rodd, 2004; Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2018). This action research project created a forum for reflection in consideration of the challenges that we face in practice at this time and enabled the team to reflect on what was working well, what needed to change, and identify steps in making those changes for the benefit of all involved. The value of action research; the invaluable role of the early years' teacher and the key to quality pedagogical practice is captured perfectly by one of the team:

"I learned that I cannot control what happens, but I can control how I react to what happens. I am so proud of Us! That we adapted to what was going on, that we put our children first, we always have the child at the centre in everything we do here" (P3).

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This manuscript named "An Action Research Project based on Teacher Reflections on their Pedagogical Practice in a Nature Preschool in the West of Ireland during COVID-19." was presented as a paper at the International Congress of Early Childhood Outdoor Practices. The permissions for the research were obtained from the institution where the research was conducted.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

This manuscript is prepared and written by a single author.

Statement of Interest

There will be no conflict of interest as the current manuscript is prepared and written by a single author.

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6.GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

İrlanda'daki erken öğrenme ve bakım ortamları, salgının Haziran 2020'deki ilk dalgasından sonra yeniden açılan ilk hizmetler arasındaydı ve Ocak 2021'de üçüncü dalga sırasında eyalette açılan tek eğitim kurumu oldu. Bu proje, personel ekibinin bu çalkantılı dönemde doğa anaokulunda işe dönüşlerinde bir destek süreci olarak başlatılmıştır. Araştırmacı, bu projeyi bir ekip lideri ve uygulayıcı olarak COVID 19'un pik yaptığı dönemde dış mekân ortamının işe dönüşü nasıl etkilediğini belirlemek için koordine etmiştir. Projenin amacı, uygulama üzerine derinlemesine düşünmek için bir alan yaratmak ve deneyim yoluyla ne öğrenilebileceğini ortaya koymaktır.

Bu nitel çalışma, pandemi sırasında öğretmenlerin deneyimleri ve işe dönme yansımaları ile ilgili dört açık uçlu soru içeren bir anketin gönüllü olarak tamamlanmasını içermektedir. Çalışma, öğretmenlerin deneyimlerini tespit etmek amacıyla yorumlayıcı bir fenomenolojik analiz gerçekleştirilerek yürütülmüş ve destek oturumlarında katılımcıların izlenmesi yanıtlara daha fazla derinlik kazandırmıştır.

Pandemi sırasında dış ortamın riski en aza indirmede faydalarına ilişkin yanıtlar arasında fikir birliği vardır. Temiz havanın bariz faydalarına dikkat çekmenin yanı sıra, öğretmenler okul öncesi kurumların bahçelerinde iletişimsel, güvenli bir alana sahip olmanın genel iyi oluş üzerindeki olumlu etkisini ifade etmişlerdir. Öğretmenler ayrıca, oyun için provokasyonlar yaratmaya ve öğrenme ve katılım için yeni potansiyel görmeye yeniden vurgu yaparak, açık havadaki pedagojik uygulamalarında değişiklikler olduğunu bildirmişlerdir.

Öğretmenler, çocukların bütünsel gelişimini desteklemek için anaokulunda doğa ile daha derin bir ilişki kurmayı teşvik etmek için yeni stratejiler belirlemişlerdir. Ayrıca, bu süre zarfında aileleri desteklemenin yanı sıra küçük çocuklarla çalışma rollerinin önemi konusunda yenilenmiş bir güven ortaya koymuşlar ve katılım için iletişim alanları yaratma konusunda dış ortamların önemini vurgulamışlardır. Eylem araştırması, çocuklarla uygulamada çalışan öğretmenlerin yaşanmış deneyimlerini rapor ettiği için açık havada öğrenmeyi ve oyunu teşvik etmek için bir savunucu olarak hizmet etme potansiyeline sahiptir. İrlanda kışı boyunca dış ortam uygulamalarından elde edilen kanıtlar, genellikle açık havada oyun ve öğrenmeyle ilişkilendirilen zorlukları ortaya koyar. Yakın zamandaki İrlanda politikası ve finansmanı ilk yıllarda açık havada öğrenmeyi teşvik ederken, eyaletteki çeşitli erken öğrenme ve bakım ortamlarında kaliteli kapsayıcı uygulamanın nasıl uygulanacağına dair uygulamaya yönelik rehberlik eksikliği vardır. Bu çalışma, ortaya çıkan müfredatın açık havada ulusal müfredat çerçevesi Aistear (NCCA 2009) altında nasıl uygulanabileceğini değerlendirmede yansıtıcı uygulamanın değerini göstermektedir. Aynı zamanda, ilk yıllarda dış mekân hizmetleri konusunda uygulamaya yönelik rehberlik sağlamak için uygulayıcılara ve eylem araştırması projelerine destek çağrısında bulunur.