

BASELINE EVALUATION OF THE EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE: FINAL REPORT



CONTENTS

Abbreviations	4	Appendix 1	68
Acknowledgements	5	Appendix 2	70
Summary	6		
Chapter 1: Introduction	12	List of Figures	
Evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative	12	Figure 1: Approach to final evaluation report ..	15
Approach to the overall evaluation	15	Figure 2: ELC Programme Strands (2006)	19
Report structure	16	Figure 3: Unemployment in the Docklands by EA (Census 2006)	21
Chapter 2: The Origins and Development of the ELI	18	Figure 4: Percentage of Lone Parents in the Docklands by EA	22
The Origins of the Early Learning Initiative	18	Figure 5: Percentage of Early School Leavers in the Docklands by EA	23
Demographic Characteristics	21	Figure 6: Percentage of Third Level Graduates in the Docklands by EA (Census 2006)	23
Conclusion	28	Figure 7: ELI operating goals and principles ..	26
Chapter 3: Living in the Docklands: Community Perspectives	30	Figure 8: 2011-2012 ELI Programme and Governance Structure	27
Infrastructure	30	Figure 9: Docklands Study Area by EA (2006). 73	
Changes in the Community	32		
Conclusion	36	List of Tables	
Chapter 4: ELI Successes and Challenges	38	Table 1: Selection of Community Based Services in the Dublin Docklands	24
The programme	38	Table 2: Attendance figures for ELI programmes 2010-2011	54
Capacity building	45	Table 3: ELI Programme Details	68
Parental involvement	51	Table 4: Percentage and number of unemployed by EA (2006)	70
Conclusion	58	Table 5: Percentage and number of lone parents by EA (2006)	71
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Issues for Consideration	60	Table 6: Percentage and number of early school leavers by EA (2006)	71
		Table 7: Percentage and number of third level graduates by EA (2006)	72
References	66		

Abbreviations

AIRO	All-Ireland Research Observatory
CDP	Community Development Programme
CHDDA	Custom House Dock Development Authority
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency
CRC	Children's Research Centre
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DDDA	Dublin Docklands Development Authority
DEIS	Developing Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EA	Enumerated Area
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ED	Electoral Division
ELC	Early Learning Centre
ELI	Early Learning Initiative
ESRI	Economic Social Research Institute
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
FSA	Family Support Agency
HSE	Health Service Executive
NCI	National College of Ireland
NICDTF	North Inner City Drug Task Force
NIRSA	National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis
PCHP	Parent Child Home Programme
PDP/CPD	Professional Development Programme/ Continuing Professional Development
PICL	Parent's Involved in their Children's Learning
SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
TCD	Trinity College Dublin

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Summary

This study is a synthesis of the key findings from a two-year evaluation (2009-2011) of the National College of Ireland's Early Learning Initiative. The study also relied on data from interviews with stakeholders and parents, and from an end of evaluation consultation with the ELI team. The aim of the study is to provide a guide to the ELI in the future development of its programme.

Background

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) is a community-based educational initiative aimed at improving educational outcomes for children in the Dublin Docklands. The initiative provides support and training to parents, families and educators through a series of programmes and activities. The ELI operates as part of the National College of Ireland (NCI) and has been delivering educational programmes in the Docklands since 2006.

Following the completion of a competitive tendering process, the Children's Research Centre (CRC) at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) was selected to carry out a baseline evaluation of the ELI. Between 2009 and 2011 the CRC prepared three reports on the ELI programmes that had undergone a pilot phase and had received significant investment:

- Developing Early Years Professionalism: Evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative's Professional Development Programme in Community Childcare Centres in the Dublin Docklands (Share, Kerrins & Greene, 2011)
- The Baseline Evaluation of the Parent Child Home Programme (Share, Doyle, Callahan et al. 2011)
- Baseline Evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme (Share & McCarthy, 2011)

The final study, the subject of the current report, concerns the overall evaluation of the ELI. It aimed to capture the experiences of schools, families and stakeholders in their engagement with the initiative as a whole.

Methodology

Maps produced by the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) based on data from the Census (2006) were used to establish the demographic context in which the ELI implements its programmes. These maps and secondary documentation were used to create a Docklands community profile. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six local parents and four stakeholders to explore their experiences of living and working in the Docklands community.

The study then examined ELI successes and challenges within the context of:

- The Programme
- Capacity Building
- Parental Involvement

It did this through a synthesis of the three earlier baseline evaluations, interviews with parents and stakeholders and an ELI programme team consultation conducted specifically for this final study. In this consultation the ELI team was invited to provide feedback on the previous three baseline evaluation reports. This feedback has informed the final report. This study aimed to provide guidance to the ELI as it further develops its programmes.

The Docklands Community

The study aimed to gain an understanding of community engagement with the ELI and the context in which this engagement took place. Data from the Census (2006) and secondary documentation describes a community that has been subject to a significant regeneration programme. Improved infrastructure, increased community support and the influx of highly educated individuals have transformed the Docklands into a heterogeneous community with pockets of affluence and of deprivation. Parent and community stakeholder interviews examined how local people have experienced these changes. While acknowledging that problems with criminality and unemployment remain, participants reported that, overall the area had benefited from the regeneration. Parents generally spoke in positive terms about the local area, the schools and community services.

The ELI: Successes and Challenges

The ELI Programme

Successes

- The ELI programmes fostered a reflective approach to practice. Throughout the programme, the ELI team sought feedback from participants on all ELI activities. This was in keeping with its community development ethos and the community action research approach to programme development and evaluation.
- Stakeholders applauded the ELI's flexible and non-prescriptive approach to programme design and delivery. Stakeholders saw this as key to the programme's success in the Docklands.

- Participants described programme content as high quality while the non-didactic design made learning enjoyable and allowed for knowledge sharing across the family.

Challenges

- The challenge of working in a wide geographic area with a heterogeneous population has meant that both advantaged and disadvantaged families are in receipt of ELI programmes. This was particularly evident in the Baseline Evaluation of the PCHP and raises the question of whether interventions should be targeted, universal or a combination of both.
- The expansion of programmes since the initiation of the ELI poses a challenge for the organisation. The ELI needs to sustain the elements of its programme that formed part of its original mission and that have shown promise based on the CRC's evaluation reports. A new numeracy initiative, the move away from the Pen Green Parental Involvement in Children's Learning (PICL) toward Síolta and Aistear training and the desire to roll out PCHP to other communities present sustainability challenges for the ELI.
- The ELI's flexible and non-prescriptive approach to programme delivery poses a challenge for evaluation.
- The presence of other primary school programmes with similar objectives is a challenge for the ELI. The impact of these programmes needs to be taken into account when considering programme content and objectives.
- While participants were invited to engage with feedback as part of the ELI's own evaluation strategy, the ELI is over reliant on the goodwill of participants to comply with data collection. This is always a challenge for organisations. Establishing participation in evaluation as a pre-requisite for programme participation may address this challenge.

The ELI and Capacity Building

Successes

- For ECCE centres, working with the ELI had fostered informal cross-sectoral contact between centres that had previously not engaged with each other. Primary school principals also reported an increased level of contact between schools in the area. This was considered to be positive and supported knowledge sharing. Other stakeholders felt that their involvement with the ELI had created links between services that were of benefit to local families.
- The ELI has succeeded in developing the knowledge and skills of parents and those working with children in the Docklands. This has been achieved through the development of networks of support and knowledge sharing and through professional development training.
- In relation to knowledge and skills, the ELI had positive effects on ECCE workers, parents and other community members who availed of ELI training programmes. This manifested as a change in their approach to working with children and parents, pride in the qualifications gained and reflection on their own parenting style.

- The professionalisation of ECCE workers in the Docklands is a key component of the ELI's capacity building work. An example of this work was found in the ECCE centres. ECCE workers were better able to engage with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Síolta and Aistear frameworks as a result of ELI training.
- Many of the women who had trained as home visitors with the ELI considered that their training had created career prospects for them and that they would be able to work in other positions within the childcare sector.
- Challenges
- There is a need for a greater focus on building the capacity of those parents who have left school early so that they can support their children as they transition to second and third level education.
- The wide geographical area in which the ELI operates as well as current financial constraints could affect the range and scope of the ELI's capacity building activities.

The ELI and Parental Involvement

Successes

- The ELI was innovative in its decision to introduce the Pen Green's PICL programme to ECCE centres in the Docklands.
- To date parental involvement in early years settings has not been well-documented in Ireland. The ELI decision to have the programme evaluated is important. This has added to the evidence-base on parental involvement in the early years sector in Ireland.
- The ELI supported parental involvement in children's learning in ECCE centres through the PICL training and in schools through the Stretch to Learn programme.
- In primary schools the Stretch to Learn programme raised the aspirations of local families in relation to third-level education.
- The Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) also succeeded in deepening parents' involvement in their children's development, especially in relation to their approach to learning through play.
- All the ELI's strategies for increasing parental involvement were well received by parents and stakeholders.

Challenges

- While parental involvement is a key aspect of all ELI programmes there needs to be a clear understanding within the ELI programme theory of what is meant by parental involvement.
- The further development of its theory in relation to the specification of parental involvement outcomes will aid evaluation. Currently it is not possible to determine how the ELI's parental involvement activities contribute to tackling educational disadvantage. In developing a theory of change around measuring parental involvement it is important to make explicit the assumptions about what will work and for whom.

- In the CRC's Developing Early Years Professionalism (2011) report, parental involvement was at the lower end of the parental involvement continuum. Parents did not necessarily perceive themselves as educators and did not engage with ELI activities that promoted this concept. This is a challenge for the ELI as it progresses its parental involvement work.

Issues for Consideration

Sustainability

- The role of the ELI, as described in the Developing Early Years Professionalism (2011) report, is to support the local ECCE centres in merging Siolta with the PICL programme. The ELI is currently involved in training ECCE centre staff in Siolta standards. The evidence suggests that the centres may have the capacity to implement these standards themselves.
- If the ELI is involved in delivering training in Siolta and Aistear frameworks, who should fund this activity? As the ELI has demonstrated success in delivering a professional development programme it could seek funding through a private public partnership arrangement to sustain these training activities.
- There is evidence to suggest that some long-running ELI programmes may have the capacity to be self-sustaining. The ELI needs to support community groups to take ownership of such programmes so that they are no longer ELI led.
- Further consideration needs to be given to how the ELI can support parents who are early school leavers to navigate the second level system as their children progress from primary school.

Evaluation

- The ELI needs to establish a plausible theory of change for each of its programmes. This would support long-term outcome evaluation.
- Understanding the local environment is essential to a theory of change, to the underlying assumptions about the programme and the direction it should take. The ELI should utilise the demographic data provided by this study to provide useful indicators for the assessment of change.
- Unanticipated outcomes can pose a problem for evaluation. A theory of change approach can account for such outcomes but needs to be subject to frequent revision in order to reflect the changes in understanding that are taking place as the intervention is implemented (Rogers, 2008).
- While the ELI undertakes important internal monitoring and evaluation of its programmes there is a need to ensure objective assessment of programme outcome indicators. For example, the PCHP has been piloted and is at a stage of readiness to undertake an outcomes evaluation. It is important that such evaluation is independent.



C H A P T E R

1

Introduction

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) at the National College of Ireland (NCI) is an educational support programme that operates in four parishes in the Dublin Docklands. It commenced programme implementation in 2006 after a period of research and development. Funded by a philanthropic consortium of Irish businesses, the ELI supports schools, families and ECCE centres in the Docklands to participate in a range of educational activities that are aimed at addressing educational disadvantage. It does this through the provision of a programme of activities, professional development training and resources for children, parents, families, schools and ECCE practitioners that span the early years through to third level.

As part of the NCI the ELI embraces and builds upon the NCI's social justice ethos and seeks to widen participation in education. Its overall goal is to provide learning support programmes that enable positive educational change in the local community.

Evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative

In 2009, the NCI commissioned the Children's Research Centre (CRC), Trinity College Dublin (TCD) to undertake a programme of evaluation to establish baseline information on the ELI's programmes. The evaluation programme commenced in March 2009 with a situational assessment to determine the evaluability of the ELI programmes. The situational assessment comprised documentary review and stakeholder interviews and provided a good understanding of the stage of readiness of the ELI for the proposed baseline research/evaluation. There was a comprehensive amount of background data available on the development of the ELI programmes. Each programme was found to be at a different stage of readiness for research and evaluation and therefore had different research and evaluation needs. Overall the situational assessment indicated that there had been significant effort by the ELI in monitoring programme inputs, outputs and evaluating user satisfaction. The emphasis on community action research and reflective practice was found to be a key element of programme delivery and informed ELI programme development.

This indicated a good foundation on which to build the evaluation.

The results of the situational assessment were explored in further meetings with ELI staff and the ELI research consultants¹. Agreement was reached on the scope of the research:

The research should take an in-depth focus on programmes that were ready for evaluation and those in which there had been significant financial investment.

The early years would be the main focus of the baseline research with a specific focus on the following three areas:

- The Pen Green Professional Development Programme: Parental Involvement in Children's Learning (PICL)
- The Parent Child Home Programme
- Overall ELI

In the following section we provide an outline of each of these evaluations:

Developing Early Years Professionalism: Evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative's Professional Development Programme in Community Childcare Centres in the Dublin Docklands (Share, Kerrins & Greene, 2011)

From 2007 to 2010, the ELI supported 24 early years practitioners from 11 community ECCE centres located in Dublin's Docklands to undertake training in Pen Green's methodology to develop partnerships with parents to support their child's learning - Parental Involvement in Children's Learning (PICL).

We evaluated the implementation of the PICL framework with the participation of five ECCE centres that had been involved in the training. The evaluation examined meanings and practices in relation to parental involvement amongst ECCE practitioners and parents, the impact of the training on childcare practices and barriers and facilitators to parental involvement in early years settings. The report was launched in May 2011 by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald TD².

The Evaluation of the Parent Child Home Programme (Share, Doyle, Callahan et al. 2011)

The PCHP is a home visiting programme that aims to improve school readiness of children at risk of educational disadvantage. A trained home visitor calls to a parent and child twice a week over two years. Each week a book or toy is introduced and the home visitor models interaction with these so parents can continue this practice between visits.

The Dublin Docklands PCHP commenced in 2007 and is based on a model developed in the United States. Unlike the US PCHP, the Docklands programme is delivered by local women, mainly mothers, rather than professionals.

We evaluated programme implementation and outcomes over a two-year period for the developmental phase (2009-2011) of PCHP in three domains: the programme, the home visitors, and children and their parents. A final report on this study was submitted to the ELI in July 2011.

2 This report is available at: <http://www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre/publications/allpublications.php>

3 The Stretch to Learn programmes at post-primary and third level were not included in this baseline evaluation because the overall focus has been the early years. In

addition, the primary strand of Stretch to Learn was found to be at a stage of readiness for evaluation level and would be more meaningful in the context of the earlier evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme in community ECCE centres in the Docklands.

The Baseline Evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative's Stretch to Learn programme in Primary Schools in the Dublin Docklands (Share & McCarthy, 2011)

The ELI Stretch to Learn programme aims to promote positive educational outcomes for children and young people in the Docklands. The programme operates in seven primary schools, three secondary schools and at third level³.

During the period March to June 2011 we gathered baseline data on contextual, socio-demographic, attitudinal and educational performance indicators from seven primary schools in the Dublin Docklands that participated in the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme. The study involved principals, 2nd and 6th class students and parents.

Overall evaluation

The overall evaluation, the subject of the current report, aimed to take a closer look at how schools, families and other stakeholders have engaged with the ELI and to explore their experiences of involvement. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four key informants representing the primary school, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and community sectors.

The stakeholder interviews aimed to elicit perspectives on:

- The rationale for involvement in the ELI programmes
- Views on ELI programmes
- Impact on the community
- Sustainability

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents who had been involved in a range of ELI programmes. We aimed to explore participants' educational pathways, experience of living in the Docklands, their perspective on their children's education and their involvement in the ELI.

The overall evaluation was also concerned with describing the context within which the ELI delivers its programmes. To this end a community profile of the Docklands is presented in chapter 2. This profile uses Census data provided by AIRO and qualitative data from interviews with parents and stakeholders.

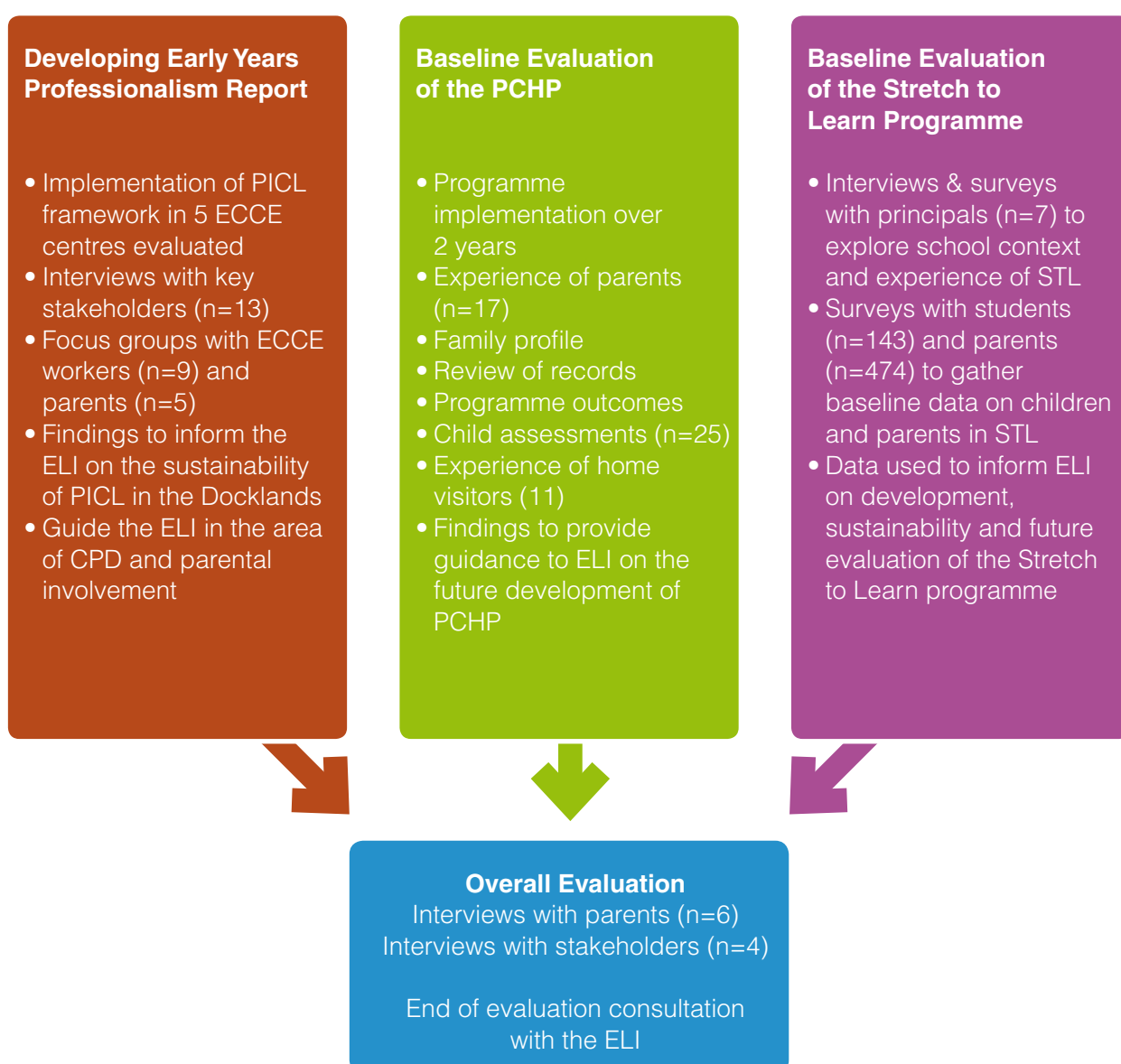
In keeping with the participatory and democratic approach adopted by the researchers throughout the evaluations, we invited the ELI programme team to complete a consultation exercise. In this we aimed to gain the programme team's perspectives in the following areas:

- Key findings from the three baseline studies
- Successes, challenges and lessons learned
- Evaluation and critical success factors

Approach to the overall evaluation

In the overall evaluation we have drawn upon the key findings from the three evaluation reports mentioned above, the interviews with the ELI stakeholders and parents, and the end of evaluation consultations with the ELI programme team to provide a synthesis of the key result areas for the ELI after a two-year programme of evaluation. The aim is to provide a guide for the ELI in its next stage of development. We illustrate ELI successes and challenges across three domains: the programme, capacity building and parental involvement. Interviews with parents and stakeholders were analysed in order to capture the impact of the ELI on the personal, professional and community life of local people. We have used the interview data to construct vignettes that illustrate 'composite characters' in the community and their relationship to the ELI. Figure 1 describes the evaluation approach.

Figure 1: Approach to final evaluation report



Report structure

Chapter 2 that follows describes the origins and development of the ELI in the Dublin Docklands. A short community profile provides contextual background and demographic data on the area and the families served by the ELI; an area that has been undergoing a programme of regeneration over the last two decades. Following this we provide some detail on the ELI's goals and operating principles and a description of its individual programmes.

In Chapter 3 we describe life in the Docklands today from a community perspective. Here we illustrate how parents and other ELI stakeholders view their community in the context of an area that has undergone considerable social change. Their perspectives on the ELI and of the changes that have taken place in schools are also detailed.

In Chapter 4 we provide an analysis of the impact of the ELI in terms of 1) its programmes 2) capacity building measures and 3) parental involvement. These areas are explored with reference to the three baseline evaluations conducted during the CRC's two year programme evaluation, the interviews conducted with parents and stakeholders, and the evaluation consultation undertaken with the ELI programme team. Impact is considered in terms of ELI successes and challenges.

Finally, in **Chapter 5** we draw some conclusions and offer some issues for consideration for the ELI's next phase.



C H A P T E R

2

The Origins and Development of the ELI

This chapter describes the development of the Early Learning Initiative (ELI). It uses secondary documentation and begins with an outline of the ELI's origins. It then traces its development from conception to the present day. Following this the ELI project community, project design and project mission and goals are described.

The Origins of the Early Learning Initiative

The Early Learning Initiative operates as part of the National College of Ireland (NCI) that is based in the Dublin Docklands. In 1997 the NCI was selected by the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA) as a partner to address educational disadvantage in the Docklands area (NCI, 1998). Subsequently the NCI tasked itself with identifying the type of education services available in the Docklands and where gaps in provision existed. Through a series of workshops to assess local needs, it identified deficits in the early years, primary and secondary sectors, and in adult education services (NCI, 1998). The NCI committed to working in partnership with the DDDA to address these gaps in services and liaised with the Authority in relation to aspects of the DDDA's own education programme (NCI, 1998, DDDA, 2003).

In 2002, the relocation of the NCI from Ranelagh in south Dublin to the Dublin Docklands was completed. Now a physical presence in the community the NCI, in partnership with the DDDA, began the process of developing educational strategies and lifelong learning opportunities for people living in the Docklands (DDDA, 2008, NCI, 1998). In 2011 the NCI celebrated its 60th anniversary and, reflecting on its beginnings as a Jesuit-led educational institution, renewed its commitment to social inclusion and widening participation in education.

The NCI and early learning

In 2006 the NCI proposed the establishment of the Early Learning for Children Centre (ELC) as part of its mission to 'enable individual and community potential through a continuum of high quality educational opportunities' (NCI, Operational Plan, 2006 Internal Document). Reflecting the earlier needs assessment research

4 NCI Early Learning Centre: Operational Plan 2006-2010
page 8

5 NCI Early Learning Centre: Operational Plan 2006-2010
page 9

referred to above, the NCI determined that the ELC would focus on early years interventions and the engagement of parents as 'co-educators' in their child's education (NCI, Operational Plan, 2006 Internal Document). The NCI also highlighted the importance of the ELC's continued support for children from early years through primary, secondary and on to third-level. In its initial development phase the ELC was charged with enhancing educational attainment within the communities adjacent to the NCI: St. Laurence O'Toole's Parish (Sheriff Street) and St. Joseph's Parish (East Wall). As part of the development of its programme, in 2005 the ELC commissioned the Dartington Social Research Unit (UK) to undertake a community needs assessment. This, combined with the subsequent establishment of an advisory panel⁴ and a review of best practice in the field⁵, led to the articulation of the ELC's mission statement:

To provide a world-class, community-based integrated programme of educational activities, training and supports so that, from birth, children are given the First Class Start that will enable them and their communities to achieve their highest potential

(NCI & ELC: 2006; 4)

An initial timeline of five years was envisioned and was supported by secured funding and an agreed evaluation framework. As shown in Figure 2 the ELC proposed a two-strand approach to tackling educational disadvantage within the north Docklands: 1) Early learning for children; 2) Community based pupil support scheme

Figure 2: ELC Programme Strands (2006)



(NCI & ELC, 2006)

Through these strands the ELC sought to support existing educational provision and raise educational aspirations and attainment in the community (NCI Operational Plan 2007, Internal Document). The ELC, as a result of its location and efforts to establish close ties with local community organisations was now in a strong position to engage the community in its educational programme (NCI Operational Plan 2007, Internal Document).

In January 2008 the ELC was re-named the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) and later aligned with the NCI's School of Community Studies. In doing so it refined its scope and objectives. Of significance was the explicit expansion of the programme to two more Docklands parishes on the south side of the River Liffey - City Quay and St. Patrick's, Ringsend.

The Project Community

The ELI operates in the Dublin Docklands, an area that has been the focus of an urban regeneration programme that began in the 1980s. Once a busy shipping area, levels of deprivation in the Docklands increased in the 1960s as Dublin Port went into decline. During the 1970s and 1980s the area witnessed economic, environmental and social degeneration. This, coupled with a government urban policy that focused on the re-settlement of inner city communities into newly developed suburban towns, contributed to a steep decline in the local population. Those that remained tended to be elderly, unemployed and/or educationally disadvantaged (Moore, 1999).

In the 1980s the Custom House Dock Development Authority (CHDDA) was charged with the redevelopment of the area and succeeded in improving the physical and the economic environment (Moore, 1999). However, the benefits of these successes did not accrue to the local community who were still experiencing chronic unemployment, displacement and low levels of educational attainment (Moore, 2002). This disparity, and the corresponding emergence of a divided community within the Dublin Docklands, raised concerns about the negative impacts of regeneration on the original Docklands inhabitants. It was with these concerns in mind that the Dublin Docklands Development Act (1997) was passed creating the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA). While primarily concerned with the continued physical development of the area, the DDDA was also committed to its social regeneration. The DDDA's social regeneration programme sought to create a sustainable and integrated community, fostering employment opportunities for local residents, reducing the numbers of early school leavers in the area and improving housing opportunities for families (DDDA, 2003).

Today, as a result of two decades of regeneration the Docklands is characterised by new apartments and older residential properties, an international finance centre, retail outlets, schools, community centres and sports and entertainment arenas. While these changes were positive for the Docklands, there is evidence to suggest that the benefits have not accrued to all equally.

Haase, in his study of the impact of regeneration on Dublin's inner city, wrote about this in terms of 'gentrification' when well-educated professionals flocked to Dublin's inner city as a result of new employment opportunities. These demographic shifts masked the pockets of deep disadvantage that remained in the inner city (Haase, 2008).

As part of its overall evaluation the CRC commissioned the All-Ireland Research Observatory (AIRO)⁶ to map Enumerated Area (EA) data for the Dublin Docklands in order to assess whether similar pockets of disadvantage exist within the ELI's catchment area. The results are explored in the next section.

6 The All Island Research Observatory (AIRO) is a research unit and interactive spatial data portal based in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. AIRO is focused on producing all-island, spatial datasets and specialist tools to aid their analysis and to undertake academic and applied mapping research. The Children's Research Centre commissioned AIRO map specific indicators for the Docklands and the ELI Catchment area. AIRO's website can be found at <http://www.airo.ie/>

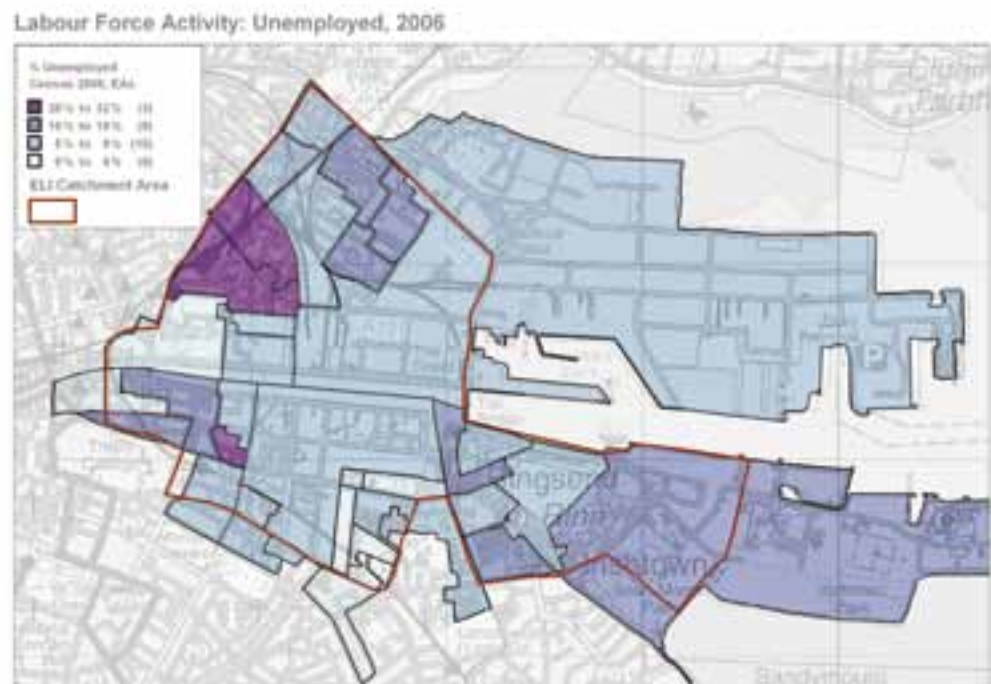
Demographic characteristics

The diversity of the Docklands is evident when we examine indicators for employment, lone parenthood and education. Data compiled by AIRO identifies these indicators spatially using data from the EAs in the 2006 Census. Although these figures are five years old they are useful in highlighting the pockets of disadvantaged referred to above. For the purposes of illustration only percentages are presented in this report. Detailed numeric data is included in Appendix 2.

Unemployment

In relation to employment data, Census (2006) recorded unemployment at 9% in the Docklands which compared favourably with Dublin city at 11%. However, as we can see from Figure 3 (map), levels of unemployment are more concentrated in some EAs than in others. From the map we can see that across 3 EAs in the Dublin Docklands, between 20% and 32% of residents were unemployed while across 8 EAs between 0% and 4% of residents were unemployed. Such figures indicate diversity and suggest that for some areas in the Docklands, unemployment is a persistent and significant problem.

Figure 3: Unemployment in the Docklands by EA (Census 2006)⁷

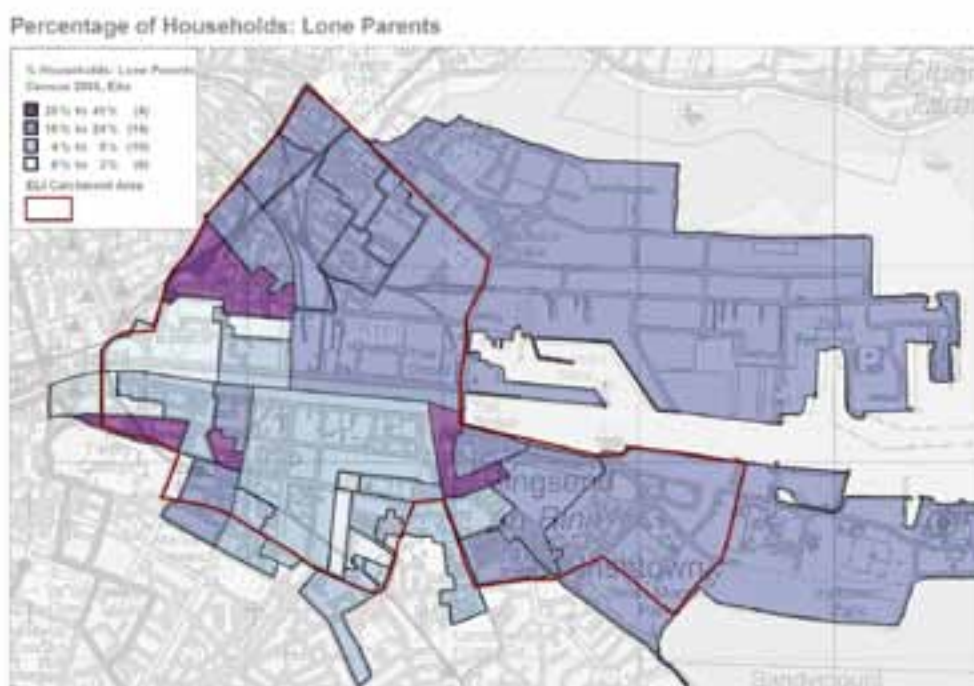


⁷ Note: While the ELI catchment area is demarcated in red, percentage ranges include areas that are within the Docklands but are outside the study area.

Lone Parents

The link between lone parenting and poverty has been highlighted in reports by the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA, 2006) and the Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI) (2010). The Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) found that, in 2009, 14.1% lone parents were the most vulnerable group 'experiencing the highest at risk of poverty rate at' 35.5% (SILC, 2009:7). In relation to children, an ESRI report (2010) found that 65% of those living in lone parent households were living in consistent poverty (ESRI: 2010). Data provided by AIRO reported the numbers of lone parent families living in the Docklands. In 2006, 13% of Docklands families were lone parent families compared with 12% in Dublin city. Figure 4 highlights where lone parent families are concentrated in the Docklands and in relation to the ELI's catchment area. In four of the EAs located within the boundaries of the ELI catchment area between 25 and 41% were lone parent families. Lower levels of lone parenting were recorded in other areas within the catchment, again highlighting the diversity of the Docklands community.

Figure 4: Percentage of Lone Parents in the Docklands by EA (Census 2006)



Educational Attainment

Changes in educational attainment levels in a disadvantaged area have been viewed as indicative of its 'gentrification' (Haase, 2008). Once a community characterised by low levels of educational attainment, the percentage of early school leavers⁸ living in the Docklands (34%)⁹ now compares favourably with the figure for Dublin city at 37%¹⁰ though it is still above the level for the state which stands at 38%¹¹. While this is positive for the Docklands, Figure 5 outlines where pockets of

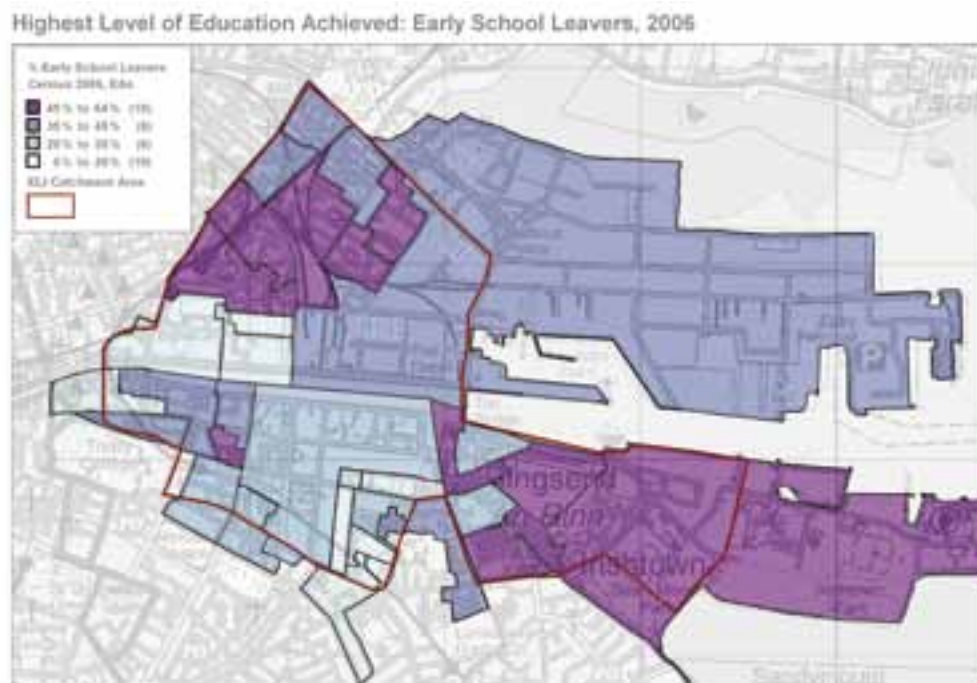
⁸ For the purposes of this study, 'early school leaver' combines the following census education categories: No formal education, Primary school education and Lower Secondary Level (Junior Certificate)

⁹ AIRO (2011)

¹⁰ AIRO (2011)

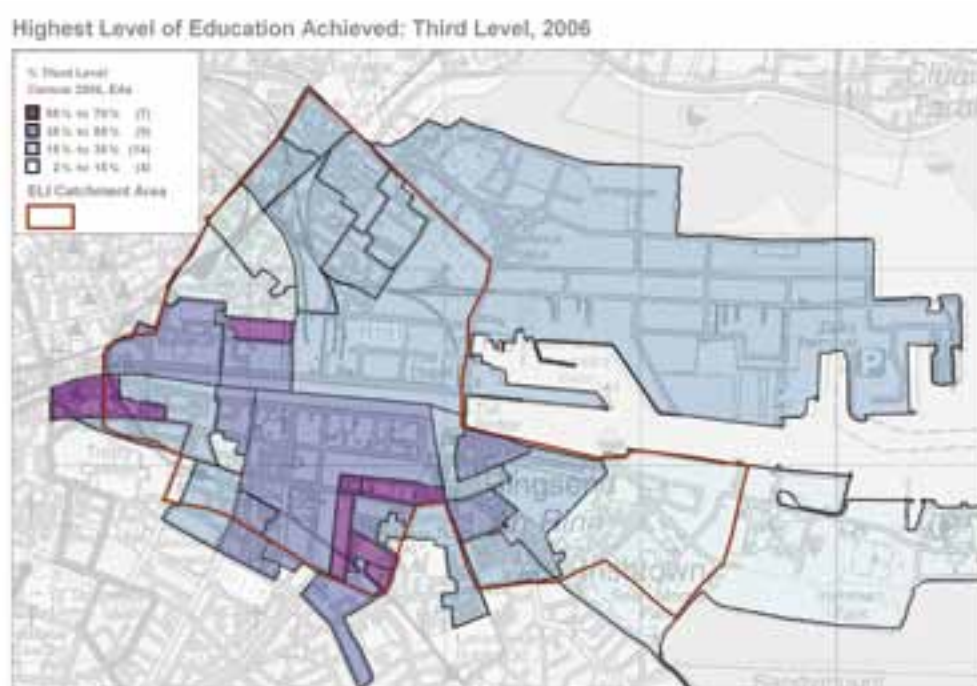
¹¹ Census (2006) <http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/education/principalstatistics/> [Accessed November 2011]

Figure 5: Percentage of Early School Leavers in the Docklands by EA (Census 2006)



In contrast it is notable that that the same Census (2006) identified corresponding clusters of third level graduates living in the Docklands. In 2006 almost one third (32%) of residents held a third level qualification compared with 25% in Dublin city¹². Figure 6 identifies where the clusters of third level graduates occur:

Figure 6: Percentage of Third Level Graduates in the Docklands by EA (Census 2006)



12 AIRO (2011)

Community Support

The demographic changes that have occurred in the Docklands as a result of regeneration have been accompanied by a surge in the number of community resources. According to an infrastructure review carried out by Colin Buchanan (CB) Limited in 2006 on behalf of the DDDA, the number of community facilities in the Docklands increased from 19 in 2004 to 207 in 2006 (DDDA, 2008:41). Table 1 identifies some of these community resources and provides brief descriptions of their services:

Table 1: Selection of Community Based Services in the Dublin Docklands

Selection of Community Based Services in the Dublin Docklands	
ASESP (After Schools Education and Support Programme)	Provides education and support to children and teenagers.
SWAN Youth Services	Aims to build positive working relationships with young people through a range of developmental, educational and recreational programmes.
DEORA project and OASIS counselling	Provides counselling and support at no or low cost to people of the north inner city
North Wall Women's Centre/ North Wall Community Development Project	The centre is committed to addressing issues of social exclusion through the development of opportunities to improve the employment prospects of local women.
St. Andrew's Resource Centre	The centre provides many services for the community: a job centre, home-help service, kindergarten, homework club, youth office, day-centre for older people, crèche and an adult education group.
Larkin Centre	The centre offers a number of community based services: welfare rights information/advocacy, adult guidance to assist people and develop their skills, a 'Job club' to equip people for employment, information and support on self-employment, and a crèche facility. They also provide a community based adult education program.

The DDDA's Community Development Projects Initiative provided support to a number of local community organisations. Examples of the type of support included the provision of crèche facilities at the North Wall Women's Centre and St. Andrew's Resource Centre and the building of a community centre in Ringsend and one in East Wall.¹³ Other support has also been provided by the Family Support Agency (FSA), the Community Development Programme (CDP), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the North Inner City Drugs Task Force (NICDTF) among others.¹⁴

13 <http://www.ddda.ie/index.jsp?p=118&n=161>
[Accessed 25th October 2011]
<http://www.ddda.ie/index.jsp?p=218&n=296&a=1072>
[Accessed 17th November 2011]

14 http://www.nicdtf.ie/PROJECTS/PROJECTS/AFTER_SCHOOLS_EDUCATION_AND_SUPPORT_

[PROGRAMME_%28ASESP%29.html](http://www.ddda.ie/index.jsp?p=118&n=161)
[Accessed 14.11.11]
Speak & FRC,(2010) The Family and Community Services Resource Centre Report Family Support Centre <http://www.wix.com/katcarjimmy/www.wix.com/katcarjimmy>
[Accessed 14.11.11]

In Chapter 3 we examine how residents and stakeholders have experienced these changes using data collected in interviews with parents, school representatives and ECCE staff. The following section considers how the ELI has developed its programmes within the context of the needs of the project community.

Project goals and operating principles

As shown earlier, since the NCI's alliance with the DDDA in 1998 the ELI has evolved from being the ELC, with a focus on two north inner city areas in the Docklands and became in 2008 an area-based initiative that includes parishes south of the River Liffey. During this period it also refined its goals and operating principles (Figure 7) and strengthened its community development approach. This is illustrated by the ELI's ethos of collaboration and respect, enabling communities to develop new skills in tackling educational disadvantage.

In the re-articulation of its goals and principles the ELI programme was, and still is, informed by the Bronfenbrenner ecological model of the child. A systems approach to childhood, this theoretical model focuses on the interactions between the child and his/her immediate environment and the significance of those interactions (NCI & ELI, 2008). Through its community action research approach to programme design and implementation, the ELI supports parents and other educators to improve these interactions with a view to improving the educational outcomes for children in the community (NCI & ELI, 2008, Bleach et al, in press 2012). To this end, the ELI provides a mix of educational supports to Docklands families in the home, in community crèches and in schools. A table detailing all the ELI programmes is at Appendix 1.

Funding and governance

In 2006 the ELI secured funding for five years through private philanthropic donations from members of the business community (NCI, 2006). In 2011 there were concerns about sustainability of funding beyond 2012.¹⁵ Securing funding for future ELI activity is an ongoing process for the ELI Review Board.

Since the closure of the NCI's School of Community Studies in 2011, the ELI is now a 'stand-alone project within the NCI' (NCI & ELI, 2011: 56). While the ELI will continue to receive support from the NCI, all administrative activities are now carried out by the ELI, placing additional pressure on increasingly limited resources. With this in mind a strategy group was established to seek additional funding to support the continuing work of the ELI (NCI & ELI, 2011: 57).

Figure 8 outlines the recent changes in governance structure at the ELI that reflect the operational changes in relation to the new Early Years Numeracy Project¹⁶ for the period 2011-2012.

15 End of Evaluation Consultation with ELI 2011

16 As part of the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) the ELI has received funding for its Early Years Numeracy Project. This programme is designed to work

in conjunction with the Child Professional Development programme (CPD), the PCHP and the Stretch to Learn programme in supporting numeracy in 0-6 year olds in the Docklands.

Figure 7: ELI operating goals and principles

To Support Educators in Families and Local Communities

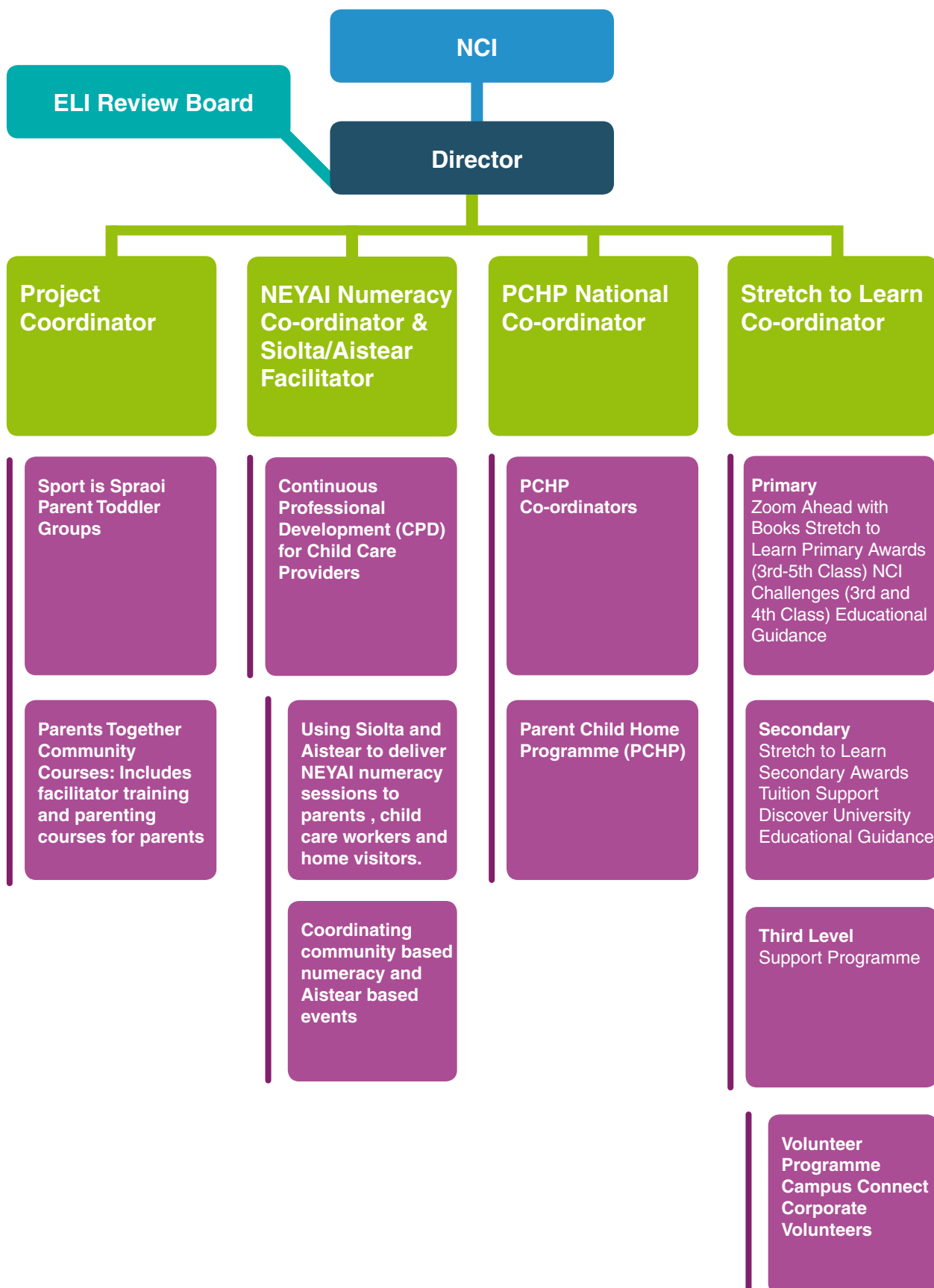
- Emphasise social and emotional development
- Communication and Language including Literacy
- Abstract thinking including Numeracy
- Play as a language of childhood
- Educational Capital and School Readiness
- Continuous professional and parental development

To Collaborate with Families and Local Communities

- Create a stable learning environment
- Develop programmes unique to the ELI to address identified needs in families and communities not addressed by other programmes.
- Support the implementation of other educational programmes where appropriate

Ethos

- Treating people with dignity, respect and courtesy
- Respecting, acknowledging and utilising the expertise and experience within the local families and communities
- Enabling and supporting the local educators to improve and develop their existing skills, expertise and knowledge
- Consulting and collaborating with the local educators in order to identify priority learning needs to develop integrated programmes that meet those needs
- Researching and preparing thoroughly in order to ensure that our programmes and interactions with the local families and communities are : effective, of a high quality, focused on locally identified priority learning needs, promoting good educational practice
- Continuously reflecting on and evaluating our work and looking for ways to develop the initiative to ensure that it continues to meet the on-going priority learning needs of local families and communities
- Sharing our programmes and good practice with the wider educational community both nationally and internationally

Figure 8: 2011-2012 ELI Programme and Governance Structure

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the establishment of the ELI within the context of the Docklands regeneration and the partnership that was formed between the DDDA and the NCI. The ELI concept was initially influenced to some extent by the objectives the DDDA. Today the ELI is no longer affiliated with the DDDA. As a result the initiative has been able to rearticulate its own objectives and principles within the context of the needs of the local community.

The chapter has also examined the community context in which the ELI operates. It has shown that the Docklands is not a homogenous community permeated by low levels of education and high unemployment. Rather, it demonstrates that the ELI operates in an area with a diverse population comprising well-educated professionals and disadvantaged groups of early school leavers, unemployed people and lone parents. Such variation within the community poses a challenge for the ELI in its attempts to target educational disadvantage across four Docklands parishes.

In Chapter 3 that follows we consider community members' perspectives on life in the Docklands today, how they relate to the regeneration and their perspectives on education.



C H A P T E R

3

Living in the Docklands: Community Perspectives

As outlined in the previous chapter, the Docklands has experienced significant changes over the last ten to fifteen years. Understanding how these changes have impacted on residents and local stakeholders is important for any organisation developing programmes based on the needs of a changing community. This chapter draws on key findings from the interviews conducted with ELI stakeholders and parents as well as secondary documentation. This section also incorporates the findings from the Baseline Evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme to illustrate these community changes in relation to the schools and education in the Docklands.

Infrastructure

Today the effects of regeneration in the Docklands are evident. The physical transformation of the area is remarkable. The infamous Sheriff Street flats have been demolished and replaced with new office buildings, apartments, shops and the National College of Ireland campus. Two bridges now link the north and south docks, physically connecting the Docklands communities. For residents these physical changes were regarded as largely positive. One resident felt that the removal of the Sheriff Street flats in particular was positive:

I miss the flats but I think it's good; the finance centre looks great now and the luas and all the different people coming to the college, the banks n'all, it was good for the area [...] it looks nice now and then people from the area can come around here [NCI] and go to college

[Dockland Parent-5]

As detailed in chapter 2 the Docklands has witnessed an increase in the number of community-based services. Schools and parents were pleased with the services available to them and felt that the area was well serviced by these. Parents were especially happy with the level of support for children outside of school hours and felt this was a marked change from years before:

there's also, with the schools, which there wasn't years ago, they're picking children up from school; it's called the After Schools Programme [...] I think that's absolutely fantastic. [...] best thing they put into the area I'd have to say-

[Dockland Parent-2]

like I know the After Schools is not [...] connected to school but I never kind of had an afterschool; now I know the school kind of encourage it and let them use the building n'all but that wasn't there for us and that's kind of a way of getting the kids off the street and doing something[...]

[Dockland Parent-5]

During data collection for the Baseline Evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme, the CRC spoke to school principals (n=7) about resources in the Docklands. One principal felt that local children were well serviced in terms of community supports:

Yeah, I would say about [Docklands 4] with clubs in the broadest sense – [Docklands 4] -, the kids are very, very well catered for [...] They have the community centre, they've lots going on, you know, to occupy themselves in their free time as well, you know, there is a strong sense of community, so they benefit.

[School principal-5]

In 2002, as part of the regeneration, the NCI became a third level education provider located in the Docklands. For local residents and stakeholders the physical presence of the college was viewed positively:

I think as well the NCI doesn't seem as scary as Trinity College would or UCD [...] it's in the community, they see it every day, like they wouldn't see Trinity College everyday or UCD

[Stakeholder-1]

you can bring pupils over and say to them that's the NCI and you can say to them this is a very real physical reality it's not just abstract talk saying 'oh what would you like to be when your older?' you can actually say 'this is the building you can go to' 'you can study this, you can go here for three hours every day for three years [pause]'

[School principal-1]

For one parent there was a sense that the presence of the college in the area had facilitated her engagement with the ELI itself:

Well the area I'm living in [...] you see a lot of people going in and out [of the NCI] as well so you can pop in anytime and just have a chat and once you get to know people and ask what programmes are going on, if there's any programmes on and they tell you like they'll direct you to whichever person-

[Dockland Parent-2]

The community interviews make it clear that the physical transformation of the Docklands has had a positive impact. The improvements to the local infrastructure in terms of the facilities and networks of community support are welcomed developments in the area.

Changes in the Community

While the regeneration of the Docklands has had positive consequences for local residents, some negative consequences were also identified. Local residents and stakeholders felt that with the regeneration a large number of local families had been forced out of the area. This localised migration was generally associated with the communities of the north inner city area. In interviews, participants linked this phenomenon directly to the physical regeneration of the Docklands where traditional housing was replaced by apartment blocks deemed unsuitable for families. These families were then subsequently re-housed outside the local area:

When people in the area looked to be re-housed they built a lot of apartments that aren't suitable for families so if a parent has [...] two young children there might only be a one bed-roomed apartment offered and so they kind of end up moving out of the area [...]

[School principal-1]

The decline in the number of young families living in the area was considered to have had a negative impact on pupil numbers in the local schools:

Since I joined the school here [...], the numbers started –probably before that too- but they have been going down slowly and a lot of that is to do with re-housing; a lot of the families, they're being re-housed in areas outside of Dublin 1

[School principal-3]

For local primary schools this decline has raised questions about the long-term sustainability of some of the smaller schools:

Interviewer: *I mean would there be a danger of there being an issue for the school maintaining itself over the next few years, if the numbers continue to fall?*

Participant: *It'll be very hard to justify our teacher number I think in this school, and also - if the numbers continue to fall - to have three schools in this small area [...] that'll be very hard to justify as well.*

[School principal-3]

Schools and regeneration

While the transformation of the area was associated with sustainability challenges for the local schools, interviewees also spoke about the improvements in these schools over the years. Parents now perceived schools to be 'warmer', 'friendlier' places and almost all felt that their children's experience of education was more positive than theirs:

I think the teachers are warmer [laughs] I think they were very cold. They had much more control, they had an awful lot of control, they interact much better now-

[Dockland Parent-3]

It's [school] sort of more enjoyable for them now. Or maybe it's just -, now I'm just going by [Docklands School 7], and just looking at [Youngest Child] now going into the senior infants, it's just so enjoyable for her, and yet she's learning everything.

[Dockland Parent-6]

Parents also felt that the standard of education that their child received was very high in the local schools:

Well as I was telling you, the kids I used to mind, they go to a good school, no names, and my, they're 7 and my young fella can read their books, you know what I mean, so it's not really, like I know the area has kind of a bad name for things but the [Docklands School 2], I think highly of the [Docklands School 2], [...] they're brilliant so I think that just because we're from a disadvantaged area it looks, they think 'aw, the kids'll probably have a bad education n'all' but it's not the case.

[Dockland Parent-5]

Mrs Fitzpatrick

Mrs Fitzpatrick has been the principal of this Docklands primary school for 23 years. Her school is housed in an old building which has seen some modifications made to it over the years. Her school is performing well, has a strong staff team and has had a good Whole School Evaluation report in recent months. When she first came to the school the area was considered disadvantaged and had lots of problems with drugs, crime and unemployment. In the past the school had experienced poor academic results, poor student results and a high staff turnover. Over the last 10 to 15 years Mrs Fitzpatrick has observed many changes. As part of a development programme the area was physically transformed and new apartments, bars and restaurants replaced the blocks of flats that had been synonymous with the area. There was also an increase in the level of support available to her school from a mixture of private, community and State sources. These supports were designed to tackle the problems that were affecting Mrs Fitzpatrick's school and others like it in the area. Mrs Fitzpatrick and her staff were very innovative in how they used these supports and have

focused on improving the educational outcomes for the children in the school.

Mrs Fitzpatrick first started working with the ELI in 2006. She and a number of other principals from the area took part in meetings and consultations in relation to the educational programmes that the ELI was developing. Mrs Fitzpatrick found these meetings very helpful and adopted some of the ELI programmes into her school's curriculum. Since then her school has continued to be involved with the ELI programmes and they have been an asset to the school. Mrs Fitzpatrick has found the programmes useful to teachers and welcomed by students and parents. Her school particularly enjoys the celebration awards that take place in the NCI itself and feel that these are important events that promote higher education for local families. They also promote greater interaction between the local primary schools. She is happy to continue working with the ELI and feels that it would be a great loss to the school if the ELI was to cease operating. While many of the school-based programmes themselves would continue, the network of support and information exchange would be lost.

It is important to explore these perceived changes through an illustration of the contextual conditions of the Docklands primary schools. All schools have benefited from support from the DDDA and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) over the past 10 to 15 years.

Between 1997 and 2008 the DDDA ran 53 educational programmes in the Docklands which amounted to €316 per pupil per year of the programme on top of the €173 capitation grant provided by the DES to each primary school pupil (Hyland, 2008).

As designated disadvantaged schools they were, and still are in receipt of a number of educational support programmes under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. These programmes focus on literacy, numeracy and on students most at risk of early school leaving. The evaluation of ELI's Stretch to Learn programme (Share & McCarthy, 2011) found that the

schools were also supported by private corporations who provide volunteers and funding for learning support programmes in the area of literacy. Though challenges remain for schools in the areas of literacy and numeracy there was a strong sense that things had improved over the years:

Well [...] numeracy and literacy is the ongoing challenge always as I said, it's getting better.[...] I mean there will always be a small critical number that will be below the national average and are unlikely to complete third level education. Aside from that a lot more of our former pupils would come in and happily show their Junior Cert results and their Leaving Cert result now so it is getting much better than it was previously even in the last 10 years

[School principal-1]

Community cohesion and regeneration

Studies on the regeneration of the Docklands (Moore, 2002) have found that the effects of regeneration on community cohesion has been negative. The demolition of the Sheriff Street flats in 1989 was reported to have caused a 'fragmentation of the community spirit that [had] previously existed' (Moore: 2002: 330). In contrast, while residents interviewed by the CRC for this evaluation conceded that there had been outward migration of local families they considered that community spirit was still strong in the area:

We're very involved with the community, everybody kind of knows each other around here, in one way it's absolutely great to grow up in an area, like some people say 'Oh, [Docklands 1] is a bad area' it's not, it's the people, it's the way you grow up, the way you're brought up, there's been a lot of bad things happen but there's also been good sides to it as well.

[Dockland Parent-2]

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Docklands should not be viewed as a single geographic community. Rather it comprises several communities within the same geographic area. The ELI itself operates within four parishes in the Docklands, both north and south of the River Liffey. Participants from these parishes viewed themselves as being from distinct communities within the Docklands. One resident described this in terms of division and resentment within the community:

there's a huge difference between [Docklands 3] and [Docklands 1] [pause] I think [Docklands 3] would like to see itself as much more superior [smiles] but you know there's nearly, there's even a snobbery in [Docklands 1], where you'd have the people of [Docklands 1] and the people of [Docklands 2] and the people [Docklands 2] see themselves as better than the people of [Docklands 1] you know

[Dockland Parent-4]

One stakeholder commented that they had observed this type of resentment when local people availed of training. They felt that this phenomenon was difficult to overcome within the local community but that progress had been made:

And I think there's definitely a sense -, you know, again when I came here there was a bit of 'Who does she think she is going off training?' you know? [...] so there was a bit of that a bit of begrudgery, but now you can see actually people looking at the likes of [ECCE Worker 3] and [ECCE Worker 4] and thinking 'Jesus they've done really well for themselves'

[Stakeholder-2]

Challenges facing the community

While residents and stakeholders spoke about the improvements to the area over the years, they also referred to challenges that still faced this community. These problems included criminality, poor literacy and behavioural problems among some young people. One stakeholder felt that crime was still an issue for the Docklands community:

I mean there's no doubt about it, it is a community of very high criminality.

[Stakeholder-2]

The availability of community supports described earlier was credited with tackling this problem by providing young people with a safe space 'to get in off the streets' [School Principal-3]. For one parent, while issues with drugs and crime in the area had increased the presence of these community organisations had helped tackle the problem:

Well the area got kind of got crazier with guns and drugs and stuff but then there's more things for the kids now [...] we have all the After School for the boys and the girls and they go up to all ages and they go on later for the older ones so that's good to take them kids off the street n'all

[Dockland Parent-5]

Primary school principals also spoke of the challenges they faced. Overall schools felt that while there had been improvements there were still problems in schools and in the community that impacted on educational progress. One principal noted that parental involvement with the school lessened as children got older. They felt that poor parental literacy levels could be a factor and noted the impact that this can have for the pupils in question:

Participant: *[...] possibly it could be that the work done in the junior classes would not be as challenging as those in the older classes too, and that could be a reason why as well that we get great support in the juniors and not in the seniors.*

Interviewer: *Yeah, so would that be an issue maybe in terms of the kids, as they get older, the difficulty they have in terms of support from home increases?*

Participant: *That could be a reason why[...] they have such problems then with literacy and numeracy, and a lot of them drop out of school, and attendance is -, there's always a few girls in sixth class – every year – whose attendance dwindles [...] punctuality dwindles [...] and just really participation in the whole school-life, daily school-life, they just lose interest.*

[School principal-3]

The impact of low educational attainment was raised by a number of principals and other stakeholders. One principal noted that for some of their parents, basic literacy can prove a challenge for them and can be a difficulty in terms of engaging parents in reading with their child at home:

Because for a lot of parents it must be very daunting for parents who can't read or can't read very well - their child comes home from school and they produce a book, and [...] they need help with it

[School principal-2]

Adult literacy was also identified by one stakeholder as a specific challenge when it came to engaging parents in their children's education:

Well it (adult literacy) needs to be addressed, as a community it needs to be addressed, but I mean if we're focusing on the programmes here under childcare I mean it's definitely -, you can see, I mean some of the mothers of the children here would be so young, and then there's an awful lot of grandparents are rearing children in the centre. So at both ends you have literacy problems.

[Stakeholder-2]

Children's behavioural problems were also identified as a challenge in the Docklands primary schools. Such problems were identified by one principal as a possible barrier to children's or parents' engagement in support programmes and were associated with complex family problems:

But I just suppose to factor into and be aware of [the challenges facing children] and maybe address them as adults, that I mean more and more and more of our children are suffering from emotional, suffering from depression, they're suffering from stress, families that suffer from emotional pressure and depression, and it's - to be aware of that.

[School principal-4]

Conclusion

This chapter has described the changes that have taken place in the Docklands community over the last 10 to 15 years in relation to a programme of regeneration and the perspectives of residents and stakeholders of these changes. It also identifies the strengths and the challenges that exist within this community as related by parents and stakeholders. The physical transformation of the Docklands has resulted in an increase in community resources. These include a number of community based services, the NCI and the ELI by extension. For residents these amenities have improved the area and provided much needed support to the community. These changes have improved the community social fabric and offered children and young people greater opportunities. Such changes have also been supported by general improvements in the educational provision in the local schools.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Concerns about criminality and poor levels of adult literacy pose a problem for local residents and stakeholders. For the ELI the strengths and challenges that characterise this community need to be taken into consideration when assessing needs and developing programmes. The extent to which the ELI has taken this approach to its work in the Docklands is explored in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 4

ELI Successes and Challenges

In the previous chapter we outlined how ELI stakeholders and parents have experienced life in an area that has undergone considerable change in its physical and social infrastructure. Chapter 2 described the development of the ELI and the NCI during this period of change. Now we return to the ELI to consider its impact on the community within this context. We do this through a synthesis of the key findings from the three baseline studies described earlier, interviews with key stakeholder and parents, and an end of evaluation consultation undertaken with the ELI programme team. The chapter aims to draw together the key results in three domains: the programme, capacity building, and parental involvement. In each of these domains successes and challenges are discussed and illustrated with vignettes. The vignettes present composite characters and capture the impact of the changed environment and place of the ELI in the everyday life of stakeholders and parents. These results are intended to inform the ELI's strategic direction and to support evidence-based programme planning and evaluation in the next phase of its development.

The programme

This section considers the ELI programme in terms of successes and challenges. As described in chapter 2 the ELI offers a wide range of educational support programmes that span early years, primary, secondary and the third level sectors. Programme successes and challenges are discussed in relation to design and implementation, and programme evaluation of the ELI's early years and primary school programmes.

Successes

Programme design and implementation

The three baseline evaluation studies¹⁷ examined aspects of programme design, delivery and implementation. A common theme noted in each report was that the ELI developed its programme of supports through a community action

¹⁷ Developing Early Years Professionalism (Share et al, 2011)
Baseline Evaluation of the PCHP (Share et al, 2011)
Baseline Evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme
(Share & McCarthy, 2011)

research or 'bottom-up' approach to the assessment of stakeholders' needs. All stakeholder groups reported that the ELI did not present them with a prescribed set of programmes. Rather, stakeholders were keen to emphasise, often with comparisons to their experiences with other groups interested in educational disadvantage, how the ELI was different and asked them what they wanted:

Oh, absolutely, it's not prescriptive in any way from NCI, they merely offer their services for the programme and then leave it to the teacher to amend or deliver the programme if you like, in what suits the teacher or the school best [...] it is very flexible so that's part of why it works here as well-

[School principal-1]

the other thing they did with the ELI is they then looked at it critically and said like 'what do you think you got out of it, do you think you could have gotten more out of the quiz or something?'; they'd have like a post mortem on it they'd look at it and evaluate it and not one of those stupid evaluation forms that we get at every meeting we go to but when we'd have a meeting they'd actually ask us what we thought of it you know it's been good for 2 years it doesn't mean you have to have a 3rd year out of it you know where as that never really existed with the [Development Agency] because in the end, sorry for pairing them together but they were the two bodies we were dealing with [...] but the ELI understood education

[School principal-6]

While stakeholders favoured the bottom-up approach to programme development they also reflected positively on the non-prescriptive approach to programme delivery. They found that the ELI was amenable to configuring programmes to suit the contexts of the schools/ECCE centres/ homes where programmes were delivered. As noted in the Baseline Evaluation of the PCHP, some parents received visits once a week, rather than twice-weekly, to fit with their personal circumstances, and a wider range of socio-economic groups was recruited to the programme in order to obtain local buy-in. The introduction of the Educational Guidance programme in local primary schools did not work for teachers in its original one-year format. As a result of consultations with teachers and principals, the ELI redesigned the programme to better meet the needs of the schools and spread the programme over two years:

the specific teacher didn't like that particular [pause] programme. Didn't like the particular programme, it was [Name of Teacher 3] herself and she didn't like that particular programme. This year it's flying – for two reasons. I think what happened was NCI listened to what the input from teachers, including here, it was changed slightly – it's only since -, last year was the first time this particular programmes, to my knowledge, it was the first time that they offered it. They were adding to the menu, right, and to be fair to them, and which they've always done is, they responded and they listened and they looked for and listed views from the teachers, views from the principals, right – now I wasn't here. This year's programme has changed [Name of Teacher 4]

[School principal-4]

Such flexibility and adaptability has also been illustrated by the ELI in their end of programme evaluation consultation:

New Stretch to Learn programmes are developed in collaboration with the teachers responsible for implementation. Based on their suggestions, we develop a programme, which the teachers implement and critique. The programme is amended according to their suggestions. This process happens on annual basis with the changes being incorporated into the following years' programme.

[ELI consultation October, 2011]

While the ELI's approach to programme design and delivery has been noted as a success, stakeholders were also satisfied with the content of the individual programmes. Schools commented on the quality of the Jolly Phonics programme, noting that they would not be able to afford such a resource. Principals were also pleased with the extra resources made available by the ELI to enhance the Zoom Ahead with Books programme (picture framing and celebratory awards at the NCI). It was felt that these enhanced the programme and provided further opportunities for parental involvement:

Participant: Yes, the fact the ELI support and fund it, and then they give us you know, they give us an opportunity to showcase it in a much bigger way than we would normally.

Interviewer: Okay, and so the parents are more engaged now that it's a bigger?

Participant: Oh they are yes, it's one of the biggest events now in the school calendar –

[School principal-2]

PCHP parents were positive about the quality and amount of programme materials. Parents receive a considerable resource of books and toys over the two-year programme:

I think the products were really good, like we still play with the jigsaws and stuff that maybe I wouldn't have known to buy, crafty things, there was a few craft things now that I wouldn't have known about that have been really good.

[Y1P7, PCHP parent]

Parents also found the content of the ELI programme to be enjoyable and felt that it made learning fun for their children. One parent who completed the parent survey described what she liked best about the ELI's Zoom Ahead with Books programme:

[it was a] chance to share stories from books with my children then deciding which part we liked best so we could draw the pictures together and talk about the story. Getting to keep the Zoom Ahead pictures from your child's early school years is nice to look back on

[DS4P165]

While stakeholders have viewed the content of the ELI programmes positively they also note that the approach to learning is successful for children and families. Instead of a didactic approach, the ELI frames learning as enjoyable and something to be shared right across the family. This is noted by schools when they talk about the Monopoly games, the Zoom Ahead with Books and the Family Celebration Awards; by PCHP parents when they provide examples of how their other children get involved with the programme child's books and toys; and by the ECCE centre staff when they speak about introducing parents to schema¹⁸ and messy play activities:

Oh yeah, absolutely and it's [Monopoly] great as it shows kids the real application of maths kind of, they sometimes see it as just some abstract subject that 'you must do 12 questions, page 52' [smiles] but this, they're really seeing addition and subtraction, division everything and the same with the table quizzes, they're

18 Schemas are the patterns of play that children demonstrate. As part of PICL, ECCE practioners observe and identify a child's schema and use this as a way of engaging parents in the child's learning.

just superb for general knowledge, history, geography, science, those things, I'd really be supportive of each of those programmes, so I think they're great

[School principal-1]

Yeah definitely cause even the boys, like we would play with the stuff with the boys when they come home. They'd come home and 'What did (child) get today?' and he'd open it and we'd go through them together.

[Y1P9, PCHP parent]

Programme Evaluation

With any community-based intervention it is important that programme delivery is aligned to evaluation to capture the extent to which programmes are achieving their objectives. As part of its monitoring and evaluation strategy the ELI invites feedback on its programmes from participants and this has been welcomed:

I do like the way after every time we do have an event like Monopoly or Scrabble or whatever, [Stretch to Learn Coordinator] always will, she will always send over the evaluations and [NEYAI Coordinator] [laughs] but they do send over evaluation not only for myself but for the class teachers which is good because I might think that something has gone really well but somebody else might not or there could be something that they think went really well and I mightn't have written it down so you're sort of getting a well rounded version of the whole thing

[Stakeholder-1]

In keeping with its community development ethos and bottom-up approach to programme development, the ELI places strong emphasis on collaborative learning and reflective practice. Rather than a linear-outcomes-focused approach the ELI adopts a cyclical process of action and reflection. In their end of programme evaluation consultation the ELI team pointed to how they applied reflective practice in the professional development programme in the Docklands community ECCE centres:

Already we have seen progress in that staff are meeting each other, reflecting and informally discussing children's progress and learning. This will have to be developed into a more formal process.

[ELI consultation October, 2011]

The focus has been on helping the centres to develop their curriculum practices, in particular assessment and planning for learning. It also encourages staff to engage in reflective practice and implement changes practice in the settings, thereby building staff capacity and ensuring the sustainability of the improvements to the quality of service in the settings.

[ELI consultation October, 2011]

Challenges

As outlined in the previous section the three baseline studies, stakeholder interviews and end of evaluation consultations with the ELI programme team illustrate a number of ELI successes in programme design and delivery, and evaluation. However, the ELI also faces some challenges in relation to its programme design and delivery.

Programme design and delivery

The ELI may be considered as a spatially-defined intervention. As detailed in chapter 2, the Docklands is a demographically mixed area and the ELI is challenged in ensuring its programmes reach those intended – those at risk of educational disadvantage. As shown in the Baseline Evaluation of the Parent Child Home Programme and the Baseline Evaluation of the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme, children and parents in the area who are not necessarily educationally disadvantaged may benefit from the ELI's programmes. The demographic data presented in chapter 2 confirms that the ELI catchment includes areas of advantage and disadvantage. The ELI is presented with a challenge when it has a remit to deliver its programmes within a geographic area. Given the area's heterogeneity a further challenge is to determine whether its programmes should be universal, targeted or a combination of both. This observation was reflected in particular in the Baseline Evaluation of the PCHP.

As shown in the Evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme in Docklands primary schools, and in chapter 2 of this report, the ELI delivers its programme of educational supports alongside a number of other players that help schools in their efforts to tackle educational disadvantage. These include: Citibank, The Trinity Access Programme (TAP), ELAN and Price Water House Cooper:

Citibank are very good to us [...] they fund our literacy hour, they help fund our literacy hour [...] they fund our play hour [...] and we have a toy library where parents come and they take a toy away for a week [...]

[School principal-2]

I mean another programme we run which is very successful too is the Toe by Toe phonics programme but that links in with Citigroup who provide 12 volunteers throughout the year and every volunteer is assigned a pupil and they come over for 15 minutes every day of the week and do 15 minutes of phonics with that pupil

[School principal-1]

Then we also have a French teacher who comes in and teaches French to the older children [...] and it was actually the [Development Agency] who began that, so it's Modern Language Organisation now who have continued it and have provided the funds for it to continue

[School principal-3]

We tagged on a new innovative programme this year where a group of volunteers from a local company come in and peer read with the kids [...] once a week in one class

[School principal-7]

These are in addition to the supports the schools receive through the Department of Education and Skills and its DEIS programme. The ELI is challenged to take into account this complex and shifting environment when designing and delivering programmes in schools.

While programme adaptability and flexibility have been regarded as ELI successes by stakeholders, such flexibility in programme delivery poses a challenge for the ELI. Where programmes are not targeted and where they are not delivered systematically, external factors that affect programme outcomes cannot be effectively controlled for. It is therefore difficult to ascribe positive changes to the ELI specifically. This is discussed further in relation to evaluation in the next section.

Programme Evaluation

Stakeholders and the ELI have welcomed programme flexibility and adaptability. Nevertheless, with the exception of the PCHP, the evaluations undertaken to date have indicated that it was difficult to determine in detail who received what programme, how much and what specifically they received. Similarly, the Baseline Evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme identified challenges to the assessment of programme impact. The schools through their DEIS programmes also respond to educational disadvantage. The ELI faces challenges in being able to determine the effectiveness of any of its Stretch to Learn programmes when these are combined with programmes that have similar objectives.

Unarticulated or emergent outcomes of programmes were highlighted in the evaluation of the PCHP programme. Though not part of the programme objective, the PCHP succeeded in empowering local women who were trained as home visitors. Such unanticipated outcomes can pose a challenge for programme evaluation though potential solutions are available and are discussed later.

Programme evaluation is also challenged when the ELI must rely on programme participants to comply with data collection. The ELI does not have any statutory remit and largely relies on the good will of those who choose to participate in evaluation activities. In its annual report (2009-2010) the ELI identified this challenge in relation to the Stretch to Learn programme where there was a very low response rate to evaluation forms (NCI & ELI, 2010;40). In community development projects there are inherent tensions between accountability, flexibility, participation, consensus, leadership and diversity (Taylor, 2000). The ELI is challenged on all of these fronts in relation to evaluation.

The evaluation challenges faced by the ELI are similar to those of other community-based interventions. Rutter (2006) in the evaluation of the UK Sure Start programme pointed out some key lessons that should be considered when evaluating early years intervention programmes. He noted the impossibility of being able to evaluate what aspects of a programme are effective when programmes are neither implemented systematically nor with an explicit curriculum. For the ELI, the variations in how programmes are implemented across ECCE centres and schools as well as high levels of adaptability in relation to programme content, especially with regard to the Stretch to Learn programme, pose a challenge for evaluation.

Programme Sustainability

The ELI has completed a five-year development phase marked by significant levels of programme activity and analysis. Yet, as noted above, it now experiences significant challenges in the further development and delivery of its programmes. When the ELI set out on its mission in 2006 it did so in buoyant economic circumstances. Today, however, the ELI faces uncertainty owing to a general economic decline and difficulties in attracting funding for its programmes. The ELI is presented with dilemmas in terms of the overall scope of its programmes. It has a desire to broaden and diversify, for example in the Parent Child Home Programme:

Work is on-going on encouraging other areas to implement PCHP. It was hoped that funds received from other areas for training and support would be used to fund PCHP in the Docklands.

[ELI consultation October, 2011]

But it does see that such activity can serve as a distraction from programme improvement:

Securing funding for PCHP has been difficult, particularly over the past year. A lot of work is going into securing long-term funding. This can distract from programme development and improvement.

[ELI consultation October, 2011]

Programme redirection can also be considered to impact on sustainability. Findings from the interviews with stakeholders and the ELI consultation exercise indicate that the ELI has moved away from areas that have demonstrated success, for example the Pen Green PICL programme and is now engaged in other programmes with the ECCE's: Siolta, Aistear and the NEYAI numeracy initiative. A challenge for the ELI is to sustain the components of the ELI programmes that formed part of its original mission and, based upon the evidence of four evaluation reports that show promise.

The CRC evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme in community ECCE centres also identified that some programmes may not now be in need of the same level of ELI support. Programmes such as toddler groups, parenting programmes and messy play activities have been in operation for some time and form part of the ELI's programme for 2011-2012. These programme have shown signs that they could be sustained locally. Such observations were made by an ELI stakeholder:

Now it's [parent toddler group] very parent led. Very parent led. They decide on what food, they specifically time table the whole day. You come in, you play, then also they have feeding time, children's feeding time, all healthy food then we do rhyme time and story time and then we do dance time and then we go home [...] I've kind of pulled away from it a wee bit just to kind of give it that sustainability, 'cause if I'm not there it needs to be able to run.

[Stakeholder-3]

Capacity building

The ELI's mission statement and ethos situates its programme of educational supports within a community development framework:

The programmes it develops focus on building up the problem-solving skills of communities and promoting the development of successful high-achieving communities.

We offer students the opportunity to acquire the skills and self-confidence to change their lives, contribute to a knowledge based economy and become responsible, active citizens.

[Early Learning Initiative Mission and Ethos]

The techniques used by the ELI to build knowledge and problem-solving skills within the community may be considered as features of capacity building. These capacity building techniques include the development of networks, community participation and training. The ELI's capacity building work is rooted in their community action research approach to programme development and seeks to increase the capacity of the community to work toward a shared goal (Bleach et al, 2012 in press).

Before we look at the ELI's capacity building work it is important to note that although the terms community development and capacity building are often considered to mean the same thing, there are important differences in the values that underpin each (Ife, 2010). Critics of capacity building approaches consider that it sets out from a deficit model of communities and that it tends to favour a linear process that fails to capture the complexities and messiness of communities and community work (Ife, 2010). In contrast, those who favour capacity building approaches see it as much more than the achievement of skills and competencies. There are advantages in considering it in terms of 'human potentialities, as releasing unrealised or unknown powers [. . .] that better enable community members and those with leadership roles to more effectively work with increasing complexity by remaining in a reflexive mode (Miller, 2010: 33).

Notwithstanding the dilemmas about terminology, there are benefits in viewing the ELI's work through a capacity building lens. It allows us to focus on tangible measures of capacity building such as knowledge and skill development and the form of capacity building espoused by Miller that supports the development of human capacities through experiential learning opportunities. Capacity building serves as an overarching theme to consider the ELI's successes and challenges illuminated by the three baseline evaluation studies, the end of evaluation stakeholder interviews and consultation with the ELI programme team.

Successes

Networks

The ELI supports schools, ECCE centres and parents to work together to enhance children's learning with the overall aim of tackling educational disadvantage in the Dublin Docklands. A successful outcome of its capacity building work has been the facilitation of cross-sectoral networks amongst early years, primary, second-level and third level sectors. While no formalised partnerships have been established to date¹⁹, as a result of the ELI's work there is evidence of functioning cross-sectoral networks.

Marie

Marie is in her mid-thirties and lives in the Docklands with her three children aged 14, 12 and 7. She became interested in being a home visitor when her son's teacher said that there was an opportunity to do a training programme at the National College of Ireland. Marie had worked in a crèche for a while, had minded her nephew since he was born and as her third child was now in second class she thought that she would like to do a bit more. Marie had left school straight after her Leaving Certificate to work in a local factory that has since closed down. Since having her children Marie has had a number of casual jobs in the area. Marie's family lived in the area for generations and her parents both left school at 13. Marie says she loves working with children and meeting families even though she found this daunting at first.

Since becoming a home visitor Marie has had the opportunity to gain three FETAC qualifications. While at first Marie found the course work challenging she has excelled and is proud of her achievements. Her family is also proud and her youngest child who attends a local primary school is happy to talk about his mother's work and loves to hear about the children she visits – he also likes to test drive the books and materials.

As a home visitor Marie also visits the local primary school where she does story-telling sessions with the children. Marie loves her job and is interested in studying more about early childhood education and care. Looking back to the days when she was in a local factory Marie feels as if she has grown considerably personally and professionally.

The evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme in community ECCE centres found that an outcome of the PICL training and the ELI's ongoing professional development programme for ECCE practitioners was the existence of a network of support among the ECCE centres. Centres that previously would have had little formal contact now communicate and share information on best practice.

So it was great. [ECCE manager] could ring some of the other girls and ask them, like how the, what were they doing, how did they cope; and we got great support from some of the centres. And then when I was doing my training as well some of the girls that worked in childcare that were working full day care, like we all got great ideas from each other and I think that all worked; that helped, yeah, definitely.

[Senior ECCE practitioner, Centre A]

The situation is similar in the Docklands primary schools. The principals and teachers from the seven Docklands primary schools share interests through their involvement in the ELI's Stretch to Learn programmes and through their participation in other ELI events.

¹⁹ It is noted that the ELI has entered into a formal agreement with the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI). The NEYAI was not within the scope of the evaluation undertaken by the CRC

While it is clear that the ELI has facilitated collaboration within sectors a prominent outcome of its capacity building work has been in the development of cross-sectoral networks. School principals and ECCE practitioners have been brought together by the ELI to collaborate on initiatives:

They [ELI meetings] go very well because you've people too from, not only from the principals from the local schools, but you have representatives from the local crèches, and... so you know, there's a good sort of exchange of views and ideas.

[School principal-2]

All stakeholder groups consider this to be a key strength of the ELI. One stakeholder noted how their involvement with the ELI had changed the way they worked with local families:

that course [ELI course] taught me about bringing people together, like care teams and if you need support for a child that you're not just working separately but bringing everyone together and discussing it all [...] if there was an attendance thing you'd have the school completion programme lady, the education welfare officer, you'd have myself, the parent, the child, some sort of rep from whichever school it is and possibly some sort of special needs or [pause] but even just that idea of bringing everybody together came out through that course because I was kind of learning the job it was just kind of really helpful

[Stakeholder-3]

Knowledge and skills

Enhancing the knowledge and skills of those who work with children and families is a key element of the ELI's capacity building work. This work takes place within the ELI's broad strategy of parental involvement. The transmission of knowledge and skills in relation to parental involvement in children's learning may be considered as deliberate within programmes such as the Professional Development Programme (PDP) for ECCE practitioners, and the PCHP. It is also diffuse as it permeates all other ELI activities such as toddler group sessions, and messy play activities.

In schools, teachers were provided with training to deliver a particular component of the Stretch to Learn programme; JollyPhonics. The ELI provided training and

Joan

Joan is an ECCE manager in a community crèche. The crèche is located in the Docklands. Despite improvements in the area there are still problems with drugs, unemployment and crime. When Joan started in the crèche there were very few children attending and the crèche was cut off from the wider community. Now the crèche is a vibrant place and serves not only the children in the immediate locality but those who live in the wider community as well.

Joan credits this change with the training that the staff at the centre have received from the ELI

as well as from another provider in the area. As many of the staff are early school leavers Joan feels that this training has empowered these local women to go out into the community and work with parents and children. Joan feels that the staff in the centre are now able to implement best practice and cope with any of the regulations and policies that are being introduced nationally. This is a change from how things were before the ELI training was available. For Joan, the ELI has been a great support to her in her efforts to raise the standards in the ECCE centre. Without the ELI she would have found this much tougher and she feels it would not have been as successful.

facilitated a forum for teachers to meet and discuss their experiences of the programme, further enhancing opportunities for professional development among the teaching staff in the Docklands primary schools.

Two of the baseline studies Developing Early Years Professionalism and the Baseline Evaluation of the Parent Child Home Programme placed strong emphasis on the ELI's role in the professional development of community ECCE practitioners, and in the case of the PCHP, the home visiting staff.

The first of these studies, the evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme (PDP) in community ECCE centres in the Docklands highlighted how ECCE practitioners that had undergone training in the Pen Green PICL programme had experienced a transformative effect on their practice. Their participation in the PICL programme had brought about 'big changes' in practice as a direct result of their exposure to its values and strategies. In terms of knowledge, skills and techniques these included:

- communication techniques to build better relationships with parents
- providing settling-in periods and strategies for new children
- the use of a key worker system
- encouraging children's autonomy through changed approaches to play and childcare routine
- undertaking written child observations
- a clearer focus on learning through play

As a result of their PICL training, ECCE practitioners were able to articulate concepts such as schema that were used to communicate with each other and with parents about how children learn through play. One ECCE manager observed that as a result of the implementation of Pen Green values and approaches practitioners now have a better understanding of the importance of children's play. Other research participants noted that exposure to Pen Green's values and practices in relation to child-centred activity ultimately had a positive impact on children in the centres:

And I do think it's helped the children because we didn't, we had a very structured environment, you know we had puzzle time, we had this time, we had that time: now it is play

[Senior ECCE practitioner, Centre E].

Their training on child observation techniques supported ECCE practitioners to develop as reflective practitioners:

I think as well your little observations helped with that because I think you kind of questioned yourself and say 'am I, am I giving that child what they need?' [...] kind of go 'God, maybe I should of done something different' -or maybe I didn't react in the way that was needed. And I think a lot of the staff have looked at how to improve [...] like [...] I suppose it's so easy to assume you know what you're doing is right or whatever, and I think because we have staff here that are here quite a long time

[Senior ECCE practitioner, Centre D].

For many centres having to reflect on practice was viewed as a cultural change but they were clear that without this reflection it would be difficult to improve practice. ECCE practitioners demonstrated that they had learned a lot about themselves through the training. They had to challenge their own and others' assumptions about engaging in child-led activity, the place of parents in the centre and of the importance of giving time to complete observations and portfolios. For some the involvement in PICL was a revelatory experience as it provided an evidence base that validated existing practice and gave them new ideas.

Overall the professionalisation of the community ECCE practitioners in the Docklands is an important capacity building function facilitated by the ELI. Many of those who work in community ECCE settings have left school early. Their participation in the ELI's professional development programme has provided them with an opportunity for re-engagement with formal learning and given them the knowledge and skills to practice as ECCE professionals. This has a ripple effect: practitioners acknowledge that the new approach builds better relationships with parents and a greater understanding among parents of the role of the ECCE practitioner. PICL also provided a good foundation for practitioners' engagement with Siolta and Aistear, the national early years quality and curriculum frameworks. Furthermore, it endorses the important role of ECCE practitioners within the community and highlights opportunities for local people who may be attracted to the ECCE sector.

The evaluation of the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) similarly illustrated how a professional development programme for the home visiting staff underpinned programme delivery. This commenced on their recruitment to the programme and throughout in the weekly supervision sessions, participation in ELI events, and in accredited training programmes.

During the period of the PCHP evaluation the home visitors undertook the following FETAC Level 5 modules:

- Family and Community Studies – Spring 2010
- Health & Safety – Autumn 2010
- Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace – Spring 2011

All of the home visitors reported that they felt a great sense of achievement in completing these courses even though initially many of them felt overwhelmed by the workload and feared they would not be able to tackle the material. Like many of the ECCE practitioners involved in the childcare professional development programme, most had left school early and pointed out that they lacked confidence and at times had struggled with the work. Their accounts are filled with pride at what they have managed to overcome and achieve.

I enjoyed it for myself and my own personal achievement.

[Home Visitor-3]

It gave me the confidence to go and do anymore courses that I wanted to do, which is fantastic. As I said I never thought I'd ever do another course again after I left school. So it has given me the confidence to go ahead and do that, it has given me the, you know, the want to go and learn more, regardless of whether it was too hard, or not hard enough ... the course is never not hard enough! But it's gone and done that, it's helped my confidence in a lot of ways to do with the job, doing other courses, with my own life then outside the job, so it's after having a major impact on me, but a good one.

[Home Visitor-10]

As with the PDP in ECCE centres the ELI has encouraged and supported reflective practice among the home visitors and this aligns with the community development ethos of its work. Home visitors undertook a course on Personal Effectiveness in the Workplace that required participants to write and maintain a reflective learning journal. Several of the home visitors mentioned the positive benefits of self-reflection. They learnt a lot about themselves; they felt better able to cope with challenges and were able to identify their strengths and weaknesses:

Insight ... I don't know what you'd say – on it. That I was able to handle it more because I was able to talk and write it, rather than it kind of always in the back of my head ... Reflect on it, yeah ... I found that yeah, by doing that ... it kind of like, you were able to kind of communicate then. I mean, at the time of the course, when you're doing it, you don't feel that you're doing anything, but then when you've finished the course and you see someone or you hear someone, just something clicks in the brain and it comes out of what you're after learning in the course, which you probably wouldn't have done it otherwise.

[Home Visitor-2]

I did because it was a lot about yourself, like, we had to give our assignment in today and how we feel as a student, and as a home visitor, what our strengths were and what our weaknesses were, so, I enjoyed writing about that. And, giving time for yourself to sit down and write about yourself, you can off-load.

[Home Visitor-3]

In all their accounts the home visitors reported that they gained valuable knowledge and skills. In turn this increased skill level has a positive impact on their work life and builds their capacity to carry out their jobs more effectively. Some home visitors referred to being more knowledgeable about the services in their own community. Furthermore, some felt their training had highlighted different approaches to use with families, and they felt better equipped to deal with parents' questions:

It actually makes sense, this course has actually made a lot of sense, because I mean it's made us as Home Visitors - I mean it makes you look at yourself and question how you're actually going into the houses and changing your approaches. It does - and then even like, when we do public-speaking for the ELI at events and stuff like that, yeah it actually makes you more aware ... Personally as well.

[Home Visitor-5]

In addition to enhancing the on-the-job skills of the home visitor the completion of these FETAC level modules has opened up other career avenues. When asked what they would do if the PCHP was no longer an option for them they all felt confident that they would be able to seek other types of work whether with a school, a crèche, working in the community, working as a health and safety officer, pursuing a career in youth work or pursuing further education.

Challenges

Limitations

Capacity building techniques in the form of knowledge and skill development and the creation and support of community networks are central to the ELI's mission to address educational disadvantage in the Docklands. However, the evaluation noted a number of challenges that may limit the successes of the ELI's capacity building strategy.

A key consideration for the ELI is how to sustain effective capacity building in the context of funding insecurity and its wide geographical remit. Evidence from the PCHP baseline evaluation and the childcare professional development study showed that where a coherent programme of development existed, the knowledge and skills acquired transferred to others within the immediate community and within the participants' own family. This was found to be the case with the community ECCE practitioners, home visitors and PCHP parents. The range and scope of the ELI's activities must be considered in the context of the difficulties of securing long-term funding.

In relation to the building of capacity through networks, this has been shown to be a critical success factor in the ELI's work. There is a challenge for the ELI is to develop a strategy that will sustain these networks while simultaneously allowing them to flourish and develop as organisational entities.

The ELI is also challenged in relation to the educational attainment levels of parents within the catchment area. For example, the Baseline Evaluation of the Stretch to Learn programme in primary schools found that a significant proportion of parents were early school leavers. Poor attainment levels were identified as potential barriers to engagement with learning programmes. In addition, the evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme in ECCE centres pointed to a lack of knowledge among parents about parental involvement in early learning when their child attends an ECCE centre. An ongoing challenge for the ELI is how to build the capacity of these parents to continue to support their children throughout their educational pathway.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement is a core element within the ELI's programme of educational supports offered to schools, early years centres and parents in the Docklands. The rationale for this approach is underpinned by international research that highlights the importance of caregiver training/education (Gable & Halliburn, 2003, cited in ELI, 2008). Research also indicates that families rather than schools are the strongest predictor of a child's school performance (Heckman, 2006). Therefore, parents should be encouraged and supported to engage in their child's learning, and ECCE practitioners should be supported to engage parents in their children's learning both at home and in out-of-home care settings.

Although parental involvement can take many forms Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) consider it to be a catch-all term for many different activities including 'at home' good parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school events, through to participation in school management/committees. McMillian (2005) notes that the term 'involvement' is often used in this context synonymously with 'participation', 'partnership', 'collaboration' or 'cooperation'.

Levels of parental involvement are also differentiated by social class, gender, culture, and religion (Bleach, 2010). Of relevance to the ELI's work is the research

evidence that highlights the impact of class background on how parents engage with the education system and how this impacts on children's educational experience (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). For example, Lareau (2000) notes that children from middle class families are more advantaged than their socio-economically disadvantaged peers because their parents actively 'teach' their children the language and skills required to succeed in the formal education system.

Parental involvement in children's education is now an expected feature of primary school education. This has been supported over the past 20 years by educational policies e.g. Education Act, 1998; Education and Welfare Act 2000, and the Primary School Curriculum (1999). Until recent times there has been little attention paid to the importance of parental involvement in early years settings. It has been highlighted with the publication of Ready to Learn (DES, 1999) and more recently the framework documents Síolta (2006) and Aistear (2009) that specifically centre on early education from birth to six years of age.

As parental involvement is a core element of the ELI's work we now consider where its strategies have been successful and where challenges remain.

Successes

Parental involvement: the ELI's professional development programme in childcare centres

The evaluation of the ELI's professional development programme in community ECCE centres in the Docklands examined the implementation of the Parental Involvement in Children's Learning (PICL) programme in five community ECCE centres (Share, Kerrins & Greene, 2011).

When we consider that parental involvement in children's early learning in Ireland is a relatively recent phenomenon a notable success is that the ELI has been innovative in its attempt to introduce an evidence-based programme of training and supports for ECCE practitioners to involve parents in their children's early learning. Its choice of the Pen Green methodology, regarded as a model of best practice, has been well received in the Docklands. The Docklands and Corby (where Pen Green Children's Research Centre is based) have a good deal of similarity, as they are both areas that have experienced deindustrialisation, economic decline and unemployment followed by a programme of regeneration.

In addition to the choice of an evidence-based model that appears to suit the contextual conditions of the Docklands community ECCE centres, another success is the decision to evaluate the programme. There is little empirical evidence on parental involvement in early years settings in Ireland on the sorts of involvement models being used, or on the benefits and limitations of efforts that aim to involve parents. In this regard the analysis of how the ELI has supported community ECCE centres and how the ECCE centres have fared in implementing parental involvement practices provides important information for the ELI's future parental involvement programmes, for ECCE centres, policy-makers and other practitioners.

Unlike the Pen Green PICL programme that was aimed directly at parents, the Docklands programme commenced with up-skilling ECCE practitioners in theories and practices related to parental involvement. The evaluation found that as a result of their training ECCE practitioners had changed practices in how they

communicated with parents. Involvement in the training had given them a greater sense of awareness of the important role of parents; the new techniques gave them more confidence to communicate with parents. The ECCE practitioners liked the fresh ideas in the Pen Green programme and were able to transfer many of these to their centres. Their involvement in the PICL training brought about successes in parental involvement practices that included: building relationships with parents; providing settling in periods for children, use of a key worker system, encouraging children's autonomy, undertaking observations, and a focus on learning through play.

The training also impacted directly on ECCE practitioners' children. By comparing their parenting in the past to current practice they explained how they now had a different understanding of the importance of their role in their child's development and the importance of play and child-centredness. A local principal noted that there had been a knock on effect in how parents working in the crèche interacted with the school:

Interviewer: *So would you say there's, as a result of that 'up skilling' that some of that gap has been closed between yourselves and the parents and the community?*

Participant: *I think, I honestly think, I've been down there and I'm talking to them and I definitely feel it, in other words the rising tide has lifted all boats, and I think they're that little bit more confident in themselves and I'm talking about the women in the crèche, like I go down and I talk to [Crèche Worker 1] and [Crèche Worker 2] and no definitely, it's hard to put your finger on it, whether it's up-skilling or just you know just, how would you say, opening up more knowledge to them, you certainly have yeah, they're that bit more professional probably and I'd say it's as a result of the ELI*

[School principal-6]

Parental involvement in primary schools - the Stretch to Learn programme

As described in chapter 2 the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme in primary schools provides a range of educational supports to schools that are aimed at enhancing parental involvement in children's learning²⁰.

For a full account of these activities and baseline data on the Stretch to Learn programme (Primary) refer to Share & McCarthy (2011).

The delivery of the ELI's Stretch to Learn programme is such that it is not possible to know the extent of children's and parents' involvement in it, and how parental involvement practices may have changed as a result of this involvement. Nevertheless, there are a number of data sources that provide useful indicators of parental involvement successes related to the Stretch to Learn programme. These include: process data gathered by the ELI on numbers of people attending ELI events e.g. Stretch to Learn Awards, Monopoly, Scrabble and other ELI events held at the National College of Ireland; accounts of stakeholders, the ELI and results from the Stretch to Learn baseline study.

²⁰ For a full account of these activities and baseline data on the Stretch to Learn programme (Primary) refer to Share & McCarthy (2011).

According to the ELI team parental involvement is a key aspect of the Stretch to Learn programme. The team considers that the programme has increased parental involvement over the years. Evidence of this is found in the attendance data collected by the ELI in 2010-11:

Table 2: Attendance figures for ELI programmes 2010-2011

Programme	Children Attend	Parents Attend	Total Attendance
Parent Toddler Groups	78	66	144
Parenting Courses	0	36	36
PCHP Programme	65	65	130
Stretch to Learn Awards	140	266	406
Zoom Ahead with Books	288	260	548
Educational Guidance	125	35	160
NCI Challenges	114	72	186
Total Attendance	810	800	1610

Stakeholders indicate that Stretch to Learn has been successful in opening up to parents the idea of their child/ren attending a third level college. This is important when we consider the context in which the seven primary schools in the programme operate. The baseline study showed that a considerable proportion of parents with children in these schools were early school leavers. These findings are also supported by the in-depth interviews with parent stakeholders. These reveal that the majority have little or no experience of third-level education in their extended families, and for most schooling has ended before attainment of the Leaving Certificate.

I finished primary school, I didn't move on to secondary, I repeated one year extra in primary school because I was too young actually to leave so I basically hung around for a year after that and from there then I just went into FAS, community employment, FAS courses, from there I done, I basically went, I done 3 years in FAS and within them 3 years I done sewing courses, I done painting and decorating, I worked in a canteen so when I left there then I took on one job in [Irish Distributors] here on [North Dublin City 3].

[Dockland Parent-2]

The Docklands primary school principals see the Stretch to Learn programme as successful as it encourages parents' attendance at NCI events to celebrate achievements and observe their children's participation in enjoyable learning activities. This benefits the children, parents and the school:

I think there is nothing as good for a parent than to see his or her child getting an award for something, I think it's very motivating really, you know

[School principal-7]

I think the whole idea of going to a third-level institution for this is probably good as well [...] I would imagine if the programmes we have weren't running the amount of knowledge that our parents would have of the NCI and ELI would be very very minimal.

[School principal-7]

The data reveal that the Stretch to Learn programme has been successful in parental involvement efforts that align with the participation/communication dimension of parental involvement (Pugh, 1989). While some programmes in Stretch to Learn promote parental engagement with their child's learning a considerable amount of parental involvement takes the form of attendance at events that celebrate their child's achievements. As these events are held at the NCI the parental involvement activity has a ripple effect as it brings parents, some of whom may have incomplete second-level education, into a third level institution. In addition, as noted by principals and the ELI, children's and parents' presence in a third level institution is beneficial as it promotes the idea of lifelong learning.

Parental involvement - home supports

Parental involvement in children's learning is also central to the ELI's Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP). A PCHP strength is its non-didactic child-centred approach. Home visitors make twice-weekly visits over two years to the homes of mothers with a child around the age of two years. They model interaction techniques with books and toys so that parents can follow in their own time with their child. Although many parents in the PCHP evaluation read to their child before they commenced the programme, particularly at bed time, their participation in PCHP fostered a deeper level of involvement in their child's learning as they now approach books and toys differently:

It has really because, say before if I was playing a game with her, say if she was doing her blocks or whatever she might be doing. If she put something into the wrong spot I would say, oh no (child), that's wrong. Where the home visitors have learned me, just let her do it if that's the way she thinks it's done. And they would just say is that right (child) and she would say Yeah! And they say okay and she'd continue down and then she'd realise that this part was wrong . . . and I thought that was actually brilliant. Where I would have kind of said straight away I would have said 'no, no that goes in here'. So that's something that I thought was brilliant and that's something that I wouldn't have thought. I would have just kept on saying no, you put it in there, that one goes there. Where this way it's actually learning her if she's putting it in the wrong spot she's going to find out at the end of it well no, that isn't right. That part I really now thought was brilliant.

[Y2, P11]

In the same way that the ECCE practitioners spoke of how the Pen Green training impacted on their own children, home visitors also reported on how as a result of their PCHP training they now had a different approach to their own parenting role. Compared to their older children, their younger children were benefiting from their mother's new approach to reading:

I would, I would actually I'd read and I'd play more now than I would have say with me own children ... I mean I sit with my granddaughter I did sit with me own children but I wouldn't have sat the way I do now.

[Home Visitor-2]

Like I said now, my youngest lad, I would have read to him but not as much as I do nowadays. I find that he can actually read more. And he is actually, holds his concentration better now.

[Home Visitor-5]

In the childcare PDP, specifically the Pen Green approach, Stretch to Learn and the PCHP, direct strategies to enhance parental involvement in children's learning were positively received by teachers, ECCE practitioners, home visitors and parents. It is notable from their accounts that when parental involvement in children's learning is tangible, in the form of observable reading and play techniques that the benefits extend beyond the programme child to other siblings and the wider family.

Tanya

Tanya has lived in the Docklands all her life. She did not go to a local school but thought school was ok and finished her leaving cert. She completed two years of a college course but left early after she had her first child. Tanya has 3 children aged 2, 6 and 10. Her eldest two children are in primary school and her youngest child is at home with her. She thinks the primary school is very good and feels that the way they teach children is much better now than when she was in school. She says that her children are doing very well and that she will help them in any way she can to get them through school and into college. Tanya is very involved with her children's school and is on the parent's council. She is not very involved in local community activities and feels that the local community is quite insular and doesn't feel welcome sometimes.

Tanya is very involved with the ELI. She completed a course called Parents Together at the NCI a few years

ago and has found this very useful, especially with her youngest. She is also taking part in the PCHP programme and feels that this programme is great and that everyone should do it. She gets on very well with her home visitor and feels that her youngest child has better language skills than her other two did at that age. Tanya has also taken part in other ELI school activities in her children's school and has really enjoyed them. She especially loved the awards ceremonies because the children loved the event and the treats and the music. Tanya took part in the Zoom Ahead with Books and really valued the time she got to spend with her son reading and drawing pictures. Both her and her son had a great time at the Zoom Ahead exhibition. They thought it was really enjoyable and they loved seeing their pictures on display. Tanya thinks that the ELI is a wonderful organisation and she thinks there should be more programmes so that learning can be made more fun for parents and children.

Challenges

In its parental involvement strategies the ELI faces a number of interrelated challenges. These concern the further development of its parental involvement strategy with a view to future evaluation and the sustainability of its approach.

Parental involvement: theory and evaluation

It is clear from the programme documentation, the baseline studies, stakeholder interviews and the ELI end of evaluation consultations that parental involvement underpins all of the ELI programmes. The Initiative's parental involvement efforts are grounded in the theoretical assumption that by increasing the educational capital of parents, these parents will then have the capacity to support their children's learning. The challenge for the ELI is to articulate its programme theory within the context of a theory of change. That is, to identify what is understood by educational capital within the Initiative and among the ELI's community stakeholders. In the Developing Early Years Professionalism evaluation and the Evaluation of the Parent Child Home Programme stakeholders articulated varying understandings of what the ELI's programmes were trying to achieve and for whom.

As the ELI works with stakeholders toward increasing parental involvement, it could explore what form and level of parental involvement is expected by participants and stakeholders. Who is the target group, what changes in parental involvement are being sought and what interventions are to be developed? In order to operationalise the ELI's programme theory on parental involvement, such questions could be explored and documented to identify indicators of success.

The further development of the ELI's parental involvement programme theory would also support more effective evaluation. There is a need to make explicit the assumptions about what will make a programme work and for whom. Currently the ELI is challenged by not being able to provide outcome evidence for how its parental involvement activities contribute to its overall aim of tackling educational disadvantage in the Docklands.

Sustainability

During its next phase it is important for the ELI to sustain its successful parental involvement strategies. As noted above, this can be strengthened by the further development of its parental involvement strategies and theory. Nevertheless, the ELI must contend with some challenges to the sustainability of its parental involvement initiatives. Some of the challenges relate to issues within settings. For example, although the childcare professional development programme was firmly focused on the Pen Green PICL programme the baseline study found that 'centres tended not to have a strategy around how they were to move forward.'

The study also found that for all centres parental involvement was at the lower end of the parental involvement continuum: the most common kind of parental involvement activity in all centres was informal chats between staff and parents about, primarily their child's mood, health and welfare, although also to a lesser extent about their child's development and learning. Parents also held different perspectives on whether they should be involved. Such findings present both challenges and opportunities for the ELI on how to progress its parental involvement work.

Another significant challenge concerns the ELI's decision to focus its parental involvement work in ECCE centres on supporting the DES and DCYA Siolta and Aistear programmes. Given that significant investment was made in the Pen Green PICL programme there is a challenge to build on the strengths of the PICL strategies that were highly valued by ECCE practitioners and that, according to the Developing Early Years Professionalism report, need to be extended to parents, e.g. schema and use of portfolios.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the impact of the ELI in three domains: the programme, capacity building and parental involvement. Based upon a synthesis of three earlier evaluation reports, stakeholder and parent interviews and consultations with the ELI programme team, we have

outlined key successes and areas of challenge for the ELI as it enters its next stage of development.

Successes have been identified in terms of stakeholders' satisfaction with the nature and delivery of the programmes, with capacity building measures that have resulted in developing knowledge and skills among local women and the professionalisation of ECCE practitioners and home visitors, and in the formation of cross-sectoral community networks. Parental involvement successes were found in strategies that promoted child-centred play, learning through enjoyable educational activities that celebrated children's achievements and involved parents at NCI events.

A number of interrelated challenges were identified, not least of which is uncertainty about funding. Challenges were considered in terms of programme scope, reach, sustainability and evaluation. Capacity building challenges concern the future direction of the ELI's capacity building measures and the need for the further development of its capacity building theory and strategy to support this work. This is also a challenge for parental involvement strategies. The ELI faces challenges with sustaining and building on the parental involvement strategies that have been successful, in being able to progress these and subsequently evaluate their impact.



C H A P T E R

5

Conclusion and Issues for Consideration

This report represents the final component in a two-year evaluation programme undertaken by the Children's Research Centre, TCD during the ELI's first implementation phase. The evaluation has resulted in a series of programme specific reports. These have provided important baseline data to aid the ELI in its next phase of development and evaluation.

The current report provides an analysis of the overall impact of the ELI on those who engage in a range of its programmes. This has been done through a synthesis of the three baseline studies, interviews with parents, principals, stakeholders, and an end of evaluation consultation with the ELI team.

We have provided insight into the origins and development of the ELI. As we traced its developmental pathway to October 2011 we illustrated the contextual conditions in which the ELI developed its programmes, and how these have changed over time. The Docklands community context is an important consideration in the analysis. Spatial maps illustrate Census demographic data and highlight the heterogeneity of the ELI catchment area. This data combined with the perspectives of stakeholders and parents provides greater depth to understanding ELI achievements, challenges and to informing its future direction.

In addition to providing the context for understanding the ELI today the synthesis of results detailed ELI successes and challenges in three key areas:

1. The ELI programme

Successes were identified in aspects of programme design and delivery. The community action research approach to programme design, flexibility and adaptability in delivery, and high quality programme materials have all been highlighted as programme strengths.

The ELI has also been successful in applying a community development ethos to programme delivery. This is evident from the extent of reflective practice that takes place with staff and participants during and after programme delivery. This supports a democratic and participatory approach to programme delivery and to the development of an evaluation culture amongst stakeholders.

The overall evaluation highlighted a number of challenges for the ELI programme. These included the need for the ELI to consider the heterogeneity of the Docklands community when developing programmes to ensure that programmes reach those intended. There were also a number of programme sustainability challenges. These concerned how to sustain successful activities, when to develop new initiatives and when to be 'hands off' so that community organisations can take ownership of ELI led interventions that have been running successfully.

2. Capacity Building

Much of the ELI's work constitutes capacity building measures in the form of network development and professional development programmes for ECCE practitioners and home visitors. The ELI has demonstrated success in its capacity building measures. As a result of the ELI's support to ECCE centres and schools there is evidence of cross-sectoral networks of people working to enhance educational outcomes for children and families in the Docklands.

Professional development programmes for ECCE practitioners and home visitors have enhanced their skills and qualifications and enriched their personal and professional lives. When combined with the ELI's emphasis on child centred practice these professional development programmes impact positively on the quality of service provision for children and families.

Capacity building challenges related to the need to address the limitations placed on the ELI's capacity building work in terms of scope, resources and the educational attainment levels of parents in the catchment area.

3. Parental Involvement

Parental involvement underpins all of the ELI programmes and is informed by the ELI's own theory in relation to increasing educational capital among parents. Through the Pen Green PICL programme and the Parent Child Home Programme the ELI has been successful in generating a changed perspective among ECCE practitioners and home visitors of the important role of parents in their children's learning.

The ELI's Stretch to Learn programme in primary schools has been successful in promoting parental involvement in their children's learning through enjoyable activities where learning is shared and celebrated with parents and other family members. The attendance of parents at the NCI for their children's celebrations and awards was considered to be beneficial as this promotes the idea of third level education to parents, many of whom have incomplete second-level education.

Challenges related to the ELI's parental involvement activities parallel those identified with capacity building work in relation to parental education. In particular there is a need to further develop and articulate concepts of parental involvement as well as measures of success. These could guide the development of the ELI's work with parents and support future evaluation. A further challenge relates to the sustainability of successful aspects of parental involvement work that have been undertaken in the Docklands community ECCE centres.

The overall analysis of the programme, capacity building and parental involvement reveals two overarching themes: programme sustainability and evaluation. In the following section we discuss these themes and outline issues for consideration within each.

Programme sustainability

In chapter 4, the issue of sustainability was raised across all three areas of analysis. Sustainability related mainly to funding but also included programme expansion and programme participation.

In relation to funding, programme sustainability is contingent on secure funding. In the present economic climate it is difficult for the ELI to harness secure funding.

Nevertheless, the ELI has responded with vigorous attempts to attract investment. However, as noted by the ELI programme team this activity can take energy and focus from programme development.

The pressure to attract funding in the present economic climate has resulted in actions and plans that impact on the sustainability of the ELI programmes. For example, the ELI, in its attempt to generate additional funding has a desire to expand the PCHP to other areas. PCHP in the Docklands has recently completed its pilot phase and is now ready for full programme implementation. It is important to be able to sustain PCHP in the Docklands. While this will require funding it will also require evidence of the effectiveness of the new implementation model. Until such evidence is available expansion of the programme in other areas may undermine the sustainability of PCHP.

Other sustainability challenges relate to the participation of parents and stakeholders in ELI programmes. For some parents, poor levels of education were identified as potential barriers to full parental involvement in some programmes. How parents perceived themselves in relation to involvement was identified as a particular concern for the ECCE centres in the Developing Early Years Professionalism report. Some parents did not necessarily see themselves as their child's 'educator' which made it difficult for the centre staff to engage them as part of the ELI strategy of parental engagement. The ELI considers that the Síolta and Aistear training and the new NEYAI numeracy initiative will address the challenges related to parental engagement [ELI Consultation Document: October, 2011]. This needs to be thought through in terms of how these activities will operate with the existing elements of the ELI programme.

Issues for consideration: Sustainability

- Currently the ELI supports Docklands community ECCE centres with Síolta and Aistear training. These are National Frameworks funded by the Irish government and are part of the new developments in Irish childcare. As detailed in the Developing Early Years Professionalism report, the role of the ELI in relation to Síolta and Aistear was to assist the centres in merging this new government programme with the innovative PICL training that had been provided by the ELI. Currently the ELI is involved with training centre staff in Síolta standards 2,4,5,7,8 and 12, with plans to include all standards in the medium term future.
- The evidence collected as part of this evaluation suggests that the capacity may exist within the centres to implement these standards. While this may vary across centres it is important for the ELI to explore this and where capacity exists to allow it to develop.

- A key issue for consideration is who should fund the ELI to deliver training in the official childcare standards and curriculum. Many early years initiatives in other areas of Dublin are co-funded by philanthropic donations and the Government. As the ELI has demonstrated success in its professional development programme in community ECCE centres it would seem that there may be the capacity to advance this work. An alternative funding arrangement such as a private public partnership could support this and would allow for funds to be directed towards other programme areas. This should be explored.
- Some ELI activities such as toddler groups, messy play activities and parenting programmes have been in operation for some time. The evaluations indicated that there is now evidence to suggest that there is capacity within local people/ community organisations to take ownership of these so that they are no longer ELI led activities.
- Poor educational levels among parents were seen to be a continuing barrier to parental involvement in learning. The evaluation has shown that there is a significant proportion of early school leaver parents in the Docklands. A key issue for the ELI is how to continue to support these parents throughout their child's educational career, particularly in the transition from primary to second-level.

Evaluation

Research literature supports the view that evaluation of community development initiatives is problematic (Hughes & Traynor, 2000; Weiss, 1995). Indeed evaluation challenges for the ELI have been raised in all of the CRC's reports, and in the current report in all three areas of analysis: the programme, capacity building and parental involvement. For the most part these challenges centre on factors that currently constrain outcome evaluation of the ELI's programmes. These include targeting, complex provision networks, flexible programme delivery and a lack of clarity about the mechanisms that bring about change. In their end of evaluation consultation, the ELI acknowledged these challenges:

While operating as a partnership in this way does not make research and programme monitoring and evaluation, including assessment, easy for external researchers, it does make for good relationship with all our partners, thereby ensuring programme implementation and hopefully successful educational outcomes for the children and their families.

[End of Evaluation Consultation: PCHP]

Nevertheless, there is potential to address these challenges through a consideration of the key evaluation issues that have been outlined in this and previous reports.

Although the ELI underpins its work with theories, (e.g. community action research, the Bronfenbrenner ecological model, parental involvement) there is a need for the ELI to operationalise its theories into logic models or theories of change. In doing so it will articulate the theoretical assumptions that are the foundation of each ELI programme within the local context in which it is being delivered. A 'theory of change' is the construction of a plausible and sensible model of how a programme is supposed to work (Weiss, 1995). It will articulate what a particular programme will do and why, how it will do it and the indicators of change over the short, medium and long term. A theory of change is often

described as as a series of 'if and then' relationships. A theory of change considers and documents the following:

- **programme assumptions:** are these plausible and does the evidence suggest that the intervention and its activities can lead to the desired outcome(s)?
- **external environment:** what are the external factors (financial, political, environmental) that can impact on each programme's operation?
- **inputs:** what are the resources required for the programme (financial, staff, infrastructure, technology, time, partnerships)
- **outputs:** what activities are required to deliver the programme (training sessions, workshops, meetings, programme materials) who participates? (agencies, families, children etc)
- **outcomes:** what results or changes does the programme bring about for individuals, groups, communities, organisations, or systems in the short, medium and long-term; to what extent are these aligned with the intended programme outcomes and the programme's assumptions.
- **indicators:** indicators need to tell us about the target population of the intervention; how much change is considered a success and what is the expected timeframe for change to occur within the target population?

Issues for consideration: Evaluation

- To date ELI programme design and monitoring has been successful in capturing data on programme processes. Evaluation data has been able to show inputs and outputs over the short-term. To move to understanding programme outcomes it is important that the ELI establish a plausible theory of change, as outlined above, for each programme. This would support long-term outcome evaluation.
- In this final report we have emphasised the community context in which the ELI operates. Data on the community as detailed in chapter 2 can provide the ELI with baseline information on the community it serves and is useful to the ELI as it explores targeted service provision. Data from Census 2011 will be available in 2012. This will provide an opportunity for the ELI to build upon the AIRO database that has been used in this report. This information would allow the ELI to stay abreast of the demographic context in which it operates and to focus its efforts on areas of greatest need. Understanding the contextual environment in which an organisation is based is essential to a theory of change and can inform the underlying assumptions about the programme and the direction it should take. Such information can also provide useful indicators for the assessment of change.
- Interventions like the ELI can be classed as complex in that unintended or unexpected outcomes can emerge during implementation. Evidence of this was found during the evaluation of the PCHP in relation to the empowerment of the home visitors. These outcomes can be accounted for using a theory of change and do not need to be limited to one theoretical assumption. For Weiss (1995) a series of programme theories about how or why an intervention may work, can co-exist. However, as part of a theory based approach to programme design and evaluation, these theories of change need to be subject to frequent revision to reflect the changes in understanding that take place as the intervention is implemented (Rogers, 2008).

- In its end of evaluation consultation, the ELI noted that it would like to see the home visitors take on the responsibility of assessment and evaluation as part of their role. While this may be useful in terms of programme management and capacity building, there is a need to ensure objective assessment of outcome indicators. The PCHP has been piloted and is at a stage of readiness to undertake an outcomes evaluation. It is important that such evaluation is independent. Nevertheless, monitoring, reflection and data collection as part of the ELI programme is ongoing and should be strengthened.

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APPENDIX 1

Table 3: ELI Programme Details 21

STRAND 1: EARLY YEARS 0-6	
Sport is Spraoi: Parent Toddler Groups	A six week session that is run in with the local parent toddler groups in the Docklands parishes. The sessions are developed by the ELI and incorporate Síolta and Aistear. The programme is designed to support reflective parenting and parent to parent support.
Parents Together	The programme trains facilitators to deliver a six week course on parenting to local parents. The course is designed to promote positive parenting strategies and to increase parental involvement in their child's development
Continuous Professional Development for Child Care Providers (CPD)	Supports early years providers through workshops and training. The focus of the programme is on increasing parental involvement in the early years setting and supporting centres in implementing Síolta and Aistear frameworks.
Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP)	This programme trained local women to work as home visitors within the Docklands community. The home visitors are assigned a local family and work with the parent and their preschool child to develop strategies that promote a love of learning through play. The programme aims to increase parental involvement in their child's education and to improve educational outcomes for children.
Early Years Numeracy Project (NEYAI)*²²	This programme will be rolled out in 2011-12 by the ELI. The programme is aimed at improving early years numeracy and mathematical skills in the Docklands and works with parents, families and schools to this end.
Stretch to Learn	A school based programme that aims to support educators and children in the Docklands. A variety of programmes are rolled out in primary and secondary school and in college.

21 All programme information compiled from NCI Early Learning Initiative: Annual Report 2010-11 and <http://www.ncirl.ie/ELI/>

22 Not subject to evaluation by the Children's Research Centre

STRAND 2: STRETCH TO LEARN 4+ YEARS

Stretch to Learn Primary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoom Ahead with Books gets children and parents to read together, fostering enjoyment of reading and promoting parental involvement. • Jolly Phonics is a phonics programme that supports educators in working with the junior classes. • Stretch to Learn Awards promote parental involvement and celebrate achievement with award ceremonies at the NCI • NCI Challenges support literacy and numeracy development and promote parental involvement through inter-school competitions in Monopoly, Scrabble and table quizzes. • Educational Guidance is a programme for 5th and 6th class students. Teachers are trained in how to deliver the programme which is designed to help students as they transition to secondary school and to promote higher education.
Stretch to Learn Secondary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretch to Learn Awards, like those at primary level, celebrate achievement and encourage parental engagement. • Tuition Support is provided in conjunction with the NCI to students doing junior and leaving certificate. • Discover University is a week long programme run during the summer months at the NCI. It gives secondary students a chance to experience college life and to develop skills that will help them as they go through the education system. • Educational Guidance at secondary level supports parents and students in the transition from secondary to third level.
Stretch to Learn Third Level:	<p>Local students attending third level are offered a participation grant and take part in a range of activities. Students are offered support through sessions addressing topics such as time-management and public speaking. Participants also act as role models for local primary and secondary students.</p>

APPENDIX 2

The following tables are divided by the ranges indicated on the maps in chapter 2. For each measure, the percentage and number of people who fall into that category are broken down by EA. A map indicating the location of each EA is also included (Figure 9).

Table 4: Percentage and number of unemployed by EA (2006)

Unemployment		
	Total	Percentage
Dublin City	29303	10.68
Docklands	1366	9.08
02/291	46	21.5
02/540	136	31.85
02/541	118	25.71
02/268	67	11.3
02/269	45	10.39
02/289	49	10.04
02/290	45	10.09
02/536	45	13.2
02/237	56	14.14
02/556	43	12.95
02/631	40	6.96
02/594	24	5.48
02/555	36	9.02
02/544	35	8.95
02/543	35	9.92
02/542	30	5.45
02/539	28	9.43
02/535	50	8.35
02/292	43	8.6
02/288	31	7.71
02/286/611	89	7
02/284	40	8.89
02/274	30	6.45
02/273	22	5.12
02/270	34	8.04
02/275	25	4.11
02/287	17	3.81
02/291	15	4.4
02/553	5	1.35
02/554	9	2.26
02/580	15	3.33
02/607	5	3.31
02/608	1	0.81

Table 5: Percentage and number of lone parents by EA (2006)

Lone Parents		
	Total	Percentage
Dublin City	57599	12.05%
Docklands	2944	12.95%
02/289	252	28.67
02/293	197	40.53%
02/540	312	33.62
02/556	160	30.02%
02/555	118	10.90%
02/544	64	10.9
02/543	70	11.78%
02/541	205	23.24
02/539	74	13.70%
02/538	115	13.59%
02/537	135	18.72%
02/536	95	13.55
02/535	152	18.56%
02/292	97	19.68%
02/288	71	12.48%
02/270	84	11.23%
02/269	100	12.21%
02/268	150	13.07%
02/273	63	8.04%
02/274	49	6.75%
02/275	25	4.38%
02/284	56	8.96
02/286/611	88	5.69%
02/287	29	5.43%
02/290	61	8.16%
02/542	40	5.85%
02/594	37	6.14%
02/608	6	4.03
02/631	9	1.04
02/607	4	2.26
02/580	4	0.95
02/554	7	1.45
02/553	6	1.33
02/291	9	2.02

Table 6: Percentage and number of early school leavers by EA (2006)

Early School Leavers		
	Total	Percentage
Dublin City	130307	36.93
Docklands	5934	12.95
02-268	547	61.74
02/269	369	58.95
02/270	266	47.93
02/289	299	50.08
02/293	178	63.80
02/536	238	48.08
02/537	234	46.80
02/539	194	49.11
02/540	295	60.33
02/541	354	56.19
02/273	257	42.34
02/290	188	36.15
02/535	252	38.71
02/538	269	44.32
02/543	192	0.41
02/544	169	36.98
02/555	162	0.39
02/556	152	39.18
02/274	177	32.42
02/284	146	28.46
02/286/611	360	25.81
02/288	107	26.03
02/292	195	31.66
02/594	106	21.63
02/275	56	8.56
02/257	37	8.94
02/291	24	8.60
02/542	38	6.97
02/553	11	3.23
02/554	9	2.46
02/580	28	6.45
02/607	10	6.62
02/608	2	1.69
02/631	13	2.74

Table 7: Percentage and number of third level graduates by EA (2006)

Third Level		
	Total	Percentage
Dublin City	89683	25.42
Docklands	5548	32.04
02/287	280	67.63
02/291	161	57.71
02/553	246	72.14
02/554	268	73.22
02/607	110	72.85
02/608	89	75.42
02/631	284	59.79
02/274	207	37.91
02/275	336	51.38
02/284	182	35.48
02/284	182	35.48
02/286/611	572	41
02/288	162	39.42
02/542	270	49.54
02/555	146	35.18
02/580	205	47.24
02/594	220	44.9
02/269	102	16.29
02/270	118	21.26
02/273	172	28.34
02/289	132	22.11
02/290	158	30.38
02/292	130	21.1
02/535	151	23.2
02/536	94	18.99
02/537	84	16.8
02/538	80	20.25
02/543	120	25.53
02/544	125	27.35
02/556	121	31.19
02/268	44	4.97
02.293	8	2.87
02/540	26	5.32
02/541	23	3.65

Figure 9: Docklands Study Area by EA (2006)



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