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*An Exploration of the Role of Pre-School Breakfast Clubs in Supporting Early
Childhood Development and Building Parent-Practitioner Relationships*

By

Eilis Lothian

Submitted to the Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirement leading to the award of Masters in Child,
Family and Community Studies

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School of Social Sciences and Law

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DECLARATION OF OWNERSHIP

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the **Masters in Child, Family, and Community Studies** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

Signature: _____
(Eilis Lothian)

Date: _____
(29th September 2015)

ABSTRACT

The scope of this study is located within the Early Childhood Care and Education sector. The study aims to investigate the role of pre-school breakfast clubs in relation to their effectiveness as a health promotion strategy, the ways in which attending such a club may support early childhood development and build solid parent-practitioner relationships also. Furthermore the study intends to discover the outlook of participants regarding the importance of good nutrition - breakfast specifically - for young children, and the possible barriers that may inhibit parents from providing children with their breakfast regularly.

Participants who took part in the study hailed from three different groups, all of whom were involved in a pre-school breakfast club to some degree. Data was collected using qualitative methodology from parents, practitioners and children who availed of the breakfast club. The research methodology included semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The methodology is complementary, meaning that the results of data collection allow the researcher to gain a more holistic view of emergent themes.

The results garnered from data collection paint a positive overview of the pre-school breakfast club and nutrition within the Early Childhood Care and Education sector in general. The breakfast club experience itself fosters plenty of opportunities for children to develop their social skills, language skills, learn about good nutrition and sample a range of new and different breakfasts. Additionally the results of the study illustrate the prevalence of strong parent-practitioner relationships. In general good nutrition is perceived by participants as being of paramount importance, especially for young children. Thus the breakfast club is an effective support strategy for childhood development and family support. However, the results of the study illustrate the resistance of a number of parents to participate in their child's breakfast club. This should be reconsidered, as it is thought to be good practice to invite parents into the breakfast club to eat with their child.

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- Aistear** The curriculum framework aimed at children from birth up to six years of age
- Breakfast Club** A breakfast club is a food service offered before pre-school sessions begin
- Early Childhood Care and Education**
A type of education that occurs before a child begins their academic schooling, typically from birth up to six years of age
- Ecological Systems Theory**
Bronfenbrenner's theory which states that the socio-cultural environment in which children are growing affects their development the socio-cultural environment in which children grow affects their development
- Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children**
A national survey to get an insight into the health behaviours of children and young people
- Health Promotion** A strategy of empowerment to help people to take control of their health
- Hierarchy of Needs** Maslow's psychological theory principally stating the fulfilment of human need requires the most basic needs to be met first
- Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs**
An initiative supported by HFFA which occurred to gain the effectiveness of breakfast clubs in eradicating food poverty
- Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes**
A programme aiming to improve children's well-being by breaking the social disadvantage trap
- Síolta** The national quality framework for all ECCE settings caring from birth up until six years

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Science
DoHC	Department of Health and Children
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EST	Ecological Systems Theory
FNGPSS	Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland
HBSC	Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children
HFfA	Healthy Food for All
HPSF	Health Promotion Strategic Framework
HSE	Health Service Executive
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
PEIP	Prevention and Early Intervention Programme
PPBC	Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs
WHO	World Health Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the lived experiences of breakfast club users and key stakeholders in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings. Breakfast clubs seek to improve the nutritional value of children's diets and offers support to working parents or families facing socio-economic difficulty (Moore et al., 2013; Shemilt et al., 2003). This chapter will outline the rationale for the research, its contextual background, aims and objectives and the structure of the study.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

In Ireland, 21% of children have gone to school feeling hungry, while 13% reported skipping breakfast completely on weekdays (Kelly, Gavin, Molcho & Nic Gabhainn, 2012). Thus the researcher was prompted to uncover the negative effects of non-consumption of breakfast on young children in contemporary Ireland, and to explore how breakfast clubs are working to reduce these above-mentioned statistics. No child should have to begin their day on an empty stomach. Little research in this area focuses specifically on the pre-school age group, thus the study will concentrate exclusively on the ECCE sector.

1.3 Contextual Background of the Study

Ireland's ECCE sector is striving towards achieving better standards of quality for young children. Historically ECCE in Ireland was not highly regulated (Rogers, 2013). In fact formal schooling was considered the beginning of a child's learning journey in terms of their developmental progress and peer-socialisation (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1999). However, there has been a paradigm shift which has resulted in early childhood gaining recognition as a crucial period, with implications for physical, cognitive and emotional development. Research illustrates conditions which will benefit one's health throughout life if present in early childhood; age-appropriate, wholesome nutrition

is one of these conditions (Centre on the Developing Child [CDC], 2015). Thus in early childhood, food and nutrition are key stakeholders regarding children's future developmental outcomes, as the Literature Review chapter will discuss in-depth.

Increased policy implementation, the introduction of a national early childhood curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009) and increased mandatory service inspection (Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA], 2006) have been key in helping to improve the prevalence of quality in early childhood care. Furthermore, because of higher service regulation and inspection, nutritional provision by ECCE services must meet minimum standards (DCYA, 2006). This ensures that children receive nutritionally-appropriate meals during their time in childcare settings. Breakfast clubs, however, do not seem to feature as a solution in addressing the prevalence of the aforementioned breakfast skipping by children. Therefore little research exists on pre-school breakfast clubs; the scope of information is primarily located within the primary school sector. Even the central database listing breakfast clubs operating in various locations (Foley, 2011) includes primary schools only; such a database specifically listing pre-school breakfast clubs appears to be non-existent. Hence the study will be of interest to the ECCE sector in relation to current nutritional policy regarding food practices in settings, especially in relation to breakfast provision.

1.4 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to investigate the potential beneficial outcomes young children may garner from attending a pre-school breakfast club, in terms of their development and nutritional intake. Furthermore the research intends to determine the effectiveness of such clubs in offering parental support and building strong relationships between parents and ECCE practitioners.

Thus, to fulfil these objectives, the study will provide those at the heart of practice in ECCE settings *and* breakfast club service users with a chance to share their

thoughts and experiences of the breakfast club in their setting. In other words, the study will consider the experiences of ECCE practitioners, children availing of the breakfast club and parents of these children. The following research questions will be addressed:

- How highly does the ECCE field regard good nutrition?
- Are breakfast clubs an effective health promotion strategy to encourage young children to form good nutritional habits?
- Does breakfast club attendance contribute to early childhood development?
- What inhibits breakfast provision by parents for their children?

1.5 Study Outline

Chapter One – Introduction

Providing a brief overview of the study, the Introduction outlines the rationale and the context in which the study is located.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

The Literature Review provides analysis of the relevant research and theoretical frameworks which exist in the area of early childhood nutrition, breakfast club provision and parent-practitioner relationships within the ECCE sector.

Chapter Three - Methodology

The Methodology discusses how the data was collected. The chapter outlines the paradigm in which the research is located, the selected research approach and design, the sampling technique used, ethical considerations, the data collection process and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four – Findings

The Findings discusses the research results. Data is presented under the common emergent themes gained from analysis of the raw information. Quotations and participants' views from each participant group will be included during the course of this chapter.

Chapter Five – Discussion of Findings

The Discussion of Findings places the data collected during this study within a theoretical context, and draws conclusions drawn from comparing the data to pre-existing models and theoretical writing.

Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations

The Conclusion and Recommendations provides an end to the study, drawn from the analysis of the research and a discussion of the findings in relation to other theoretical works. Recommendations that have arisen from the study for future policy and practice regarding the research topic will also be made.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The early years of a child's life are characterised as a crucial period, witnessing rapid phases of growth, learning and development (Doherty & Hughes, 2009; National Audit Office [NAO], 2004). Children should be nurtured throughout this developmental journey to ensure complete physical and mental well-being (Marotz, 2012). Nutritional intake has a fundamental influence on the state of a child's health and holistic development (Marotz, 2012).

Although consuming a nourishing breakfast bears great advantages for young children, research exists illustrating the prevalence of frequent breakfast skipping amongst young children in contemporary Ireland. Therefore this chapter reviews literature relevant to early childhood nutrition and the supports available which encourage young children to adopt a healthy diet from the start. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector as it exists in Ireland today will be firstly discussed, to provide one with contextual background upon which the literature review can be built.

2.2 Early Childhood Care and Education

Historically the State's role in ECCE was marginal; little childcare policy existed pre-1990 (Rogers, 2013) and parents were traditionally recognised as children's primary educators during childhood (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937). However Ireland's ECCE landscape has reformed; female workforce participation has risen (French, 2007) and from 2006-2011 the number of 0-4 year-olds living in Ireland rose by 17.9% (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2012), resulting in higher demand for childcare.

2.2.1 Quality ECCE

Exposure to high-quality care during the early years is beneficial for young children (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006). In fact low-quality practice can prove detrimental (Department of Children

and Youth Affairs [DCYA], 2013). Nevertheless it is argued that low government investment and poor pay has resulted in a low-ranking ECCE workforce (Moloney, 2014), affecting quality immensely. Furthermore, ECCE practitioners are scarcely recognised as educators - ‘education’ is associated with academic schooling (Corbett, 2012). Developmental psychology literature, though, explains how rapidly development occurs before formal schooling begins (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1999; Santrock, 2011). By four years-of-age children can converse with others and, according to Piaget, they show increasing use of mental representations as they mature, evident through their unstructured play (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). Not only are ECCE practitioners educators of young children, they also track children’s development and collaborate with parents (Scott, 2012).

Fortunately, Ireland has proved its growing recognition of the importance of ECCE in supporting early childhood development, through increased sectoral regulation. The Free Pre-school Year, introduced in 2010, recognises ‘the benefits of early education for young children’ (Corbett, 2012, p. 295), while pre-school service leaders participating in the scheme must hold a minimum educational qualification (Moloney, 2014). Additionally the introduction of Síolta - the national quality framework for ECCE services - in 2006 is further proof of Ireland’s dedication to improving quality in ECCE (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2006; Moloney, 2014). Furthermore adult-to-child ratios, Garda vetting of staff/volunteers and nutrition guidelines are in place, all of which support children’s safety and nurture their well-being. The chapter focuses specifically on early childhood food and nutrition policies in the following section, as predetermined by the research topic and its aims.

2.2.2 Nutritional policies in ECCE

The introduction of an ECCE curriculum (Aistear), revised regulations and pre-school nutrition guidelines are significant developments in ECCE of late. Aistear, introduced in 2009, empowers children to grow as confident learners during their ECCE experience (Moloney, 2014; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009). As aforementioned, nutritional intake has a profound

effect on holistic well-being. Consequently Aistear specifically states that ‘children will be as healthy and fit as they can be’ (NCCA, 2009, p. 17), whilst in childcare settings. Practitioners must therefore help children to always make healthy nutritional choices (NCCA, 2009).

Additionally the Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations were revised in 2006 (DCYA, 2006). Regulation 5 was introduced, reinforcing the importance of childhood development and well-being while Regulation 26 calls for minimum standards of nutrition and food safety for all children (DCYA, 2006; Jenkins, 2012). This is significant because ECCE settings *must* adhere to the regulatory protocols and pre-schools are inspected periodically (DCYA, 2006). Therefore settings are obligated to provide nutritious meals.

Furthermore, the Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-school Services (FNGPSS) 2004, advocates the long-term benefits of wholesome childhood diets (Department of Health and Children [DoHC], 2004). The FNGPSS offer clear, useful advice for ECCE practitioners regarding healthy meal and snack provision for 0-5 year-olds (DoHC, 2004), thus empowering settings to take control of their nutritional provision.

Therefore nutrition is highly regarded in ECCE policy; the importance of providing nutritious food and helping children to make healthy choices are included in the national curriculum framework and ECCE legislation. However breakfast provision remains unclear; Aistear mentions snack- and lunch-time only (NCCA, 2009, p. 22), while the Regulations (DCYA, 2006) provide guidance only regarding meal-time frequency (determined by the length of time children are in childcare settings). Nutrition and development in early childhood will now be discussed through a theoretical lens.

2.3 Nutrition and Development in Early Childhood

Physical, social and cognitive development occurs rapidly from 0-6 years (Keenan & Evans, 2009; NCCA, 2009). This development is intertwined with various contextual influences (Doherty & Hughes, 2009) including socio-cultural and

dietary/lifestyle contexts. In fact, research cites three specific conditions that should be present in childhood to promote good health throughout the lifespan. They are a stable network of positive adult-child relationships, sound physical environments free from hazards and appropriate nutrition in early childhood (Centre on the Developing Child [CDC], 2015; Sturley-Pope, 2012). These conditions ensure childhood experiences are positive and provide children with solid foundations upon which their learning and development can occur (CDC, 2015).

Numerous models explain childhood development, including Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Keenan & Evans, 2009) or Bandura's language acquisition model (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). However, an in-depth discussion regarding various developmental models is beyond the scope of this literature review. Nonetheless, the chapter will present underpinning psychological/social theories relative to early childhood nutrition. Maslow's theory will be explored initially.

2.3.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1954) places all human needs upon a hierarchical triangular model. Basic physiological needs are at the bottom, with more desirable esteem needs on top (Figure 1). Basic human survival relies on the fulfilment of hunger, thirst and sleep; therefore physiological needs *must* be met before one can climb the hierarchy to find self-actualisation.

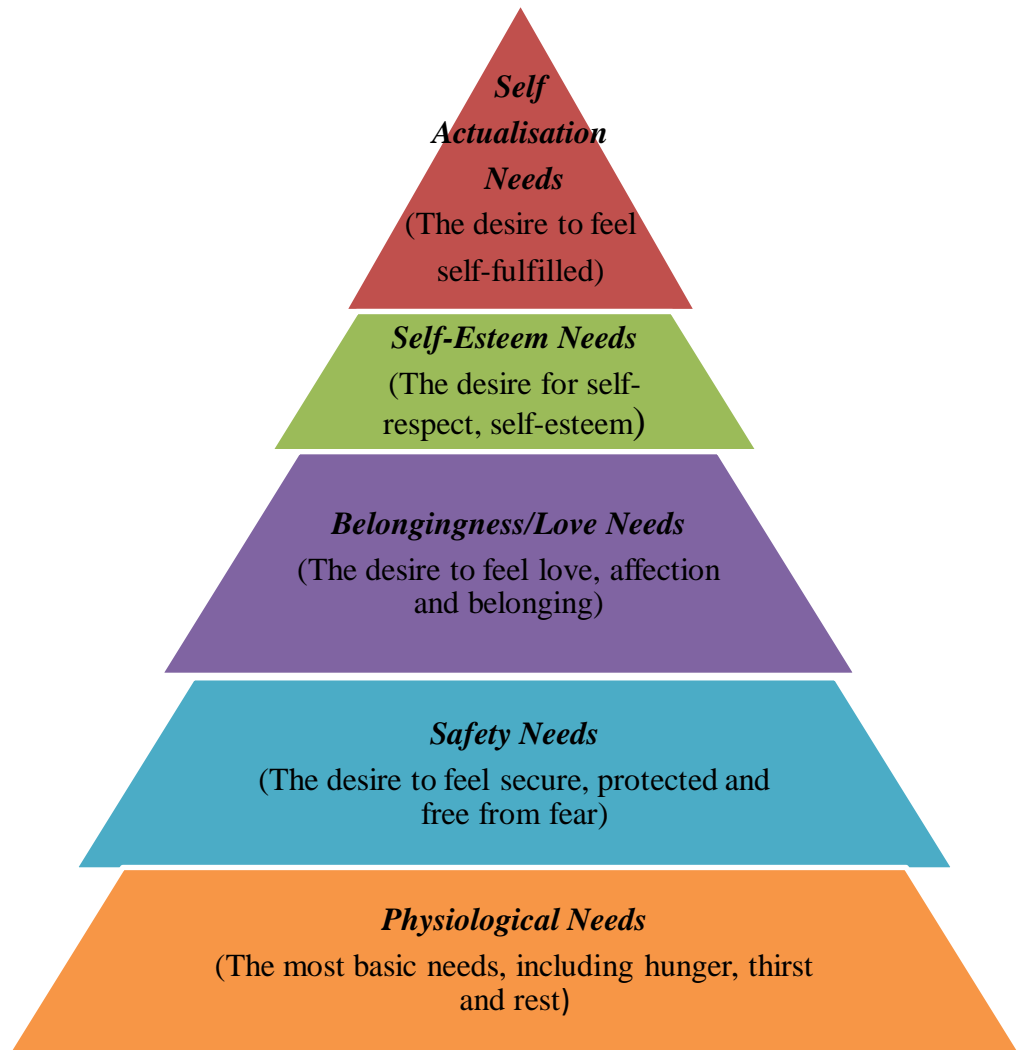


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Adapted from Maslow, 1954)

Good nutrition should be of utmost importance to humans, especially during the formative years of a child's life (Hillger, Kirch & Wolfram, 2008). From a lifespan perspective, negative attitudes towards nutrition can stem from early childhood (Hillger et al., 2008). Childhood behaviour patterns often emerge through observational learning and behaviour modelling (Santrock, 2011). When children are surrounded by unhealthy nutritional habits, such as regular breakfast skipping or over-eating, these habits can be carried into adulthood (SafeFood, 2011). Nutrition-related illnesses including obesity can have a negative effect on a child's quality-of-life and self-perception (Hillger et al., 2008). Thus children may

falter on the journey to self-actualisation (Maslow, 1954), because experiencing such nutrition-related illness can affect well-being and confidence.

Consequently, it is extremely important that the ECCE sector supports children's journey to self-actualisation. Initial experiences of a child's life are strong predictors of adult behaviour (Eysenck, 2009). Children should always be provided with the best supports in any environment, to meet their most basic needs and promote self-growth and self-worth (Maslow, 1954). The sector is striving to achieve this, through increased regulation, acknowledging the importance of well-being and establishing a national minimum quality standard to which all settings must adhere as previously discussed. However effective parent-practitioner collaboration for the child's benefit is extremely important also, as Bronfenbrenner's theory outlines.

2.3.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

According to the Ecological Systems Theory (EST), the socio-cultural environment in which children grow affects their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eysenck, 2009). Children's developmental progress is an essence of a fluid combination of their various ecological systems and personal traits (Wieczorek-Deering & Halpenny, 2012). The systems range from the small immediate microsystem, such as the child's family/ECCE setting, to the macrosystem, including cultural context (Doherty & Hughes, 2009; Eysenck, 2009). The innermost layer of the EST, the mesosystem which links children's various microsystems, is applicable to this chapter. In an ECCE context, parent-practitioner relationships are classified as a mesosystem because the relationship links the pre-school environment to home (Wieczorek-Deering & Halpenny, 2012).

One must recall the theory of observational learning; the promotion of healthy breakfast habits from the beginning of life by parents and ECCE practitioners can positively contribute to a child's health throughout the lifespan. Research illustrates how parents strongly influence children's eating behaviour patterns during shared mealtimes in terms of the child's meal-time enjoyment and

fussiness (Palfreyman, Haycraft & Meyer, 2015). However, earlier research states 20% of adults skip breakfast (Gibson & Gunn, 2011), which can model negative habits for children. Thus in terms of the EST, it is extremely important that parents and ECCE practitioners within the child's mesosystem collaborate effectively to model positive attitudes towards breakfast consumption.

However, this can prove a difficult task. Building meaningful parent-practitioner relationships can be limited by a lack of shared understanding regarding the term or constrained simply by time (MacNeill, 2009). Therefore practitioners must actively seek to build strong relationships with parents to avoid lack of partnership.

2.4 Functions of ECCE

So far the chapter has discussed the evolution of the Irish ECCE sector, and the importance of positive nutritional habit formation in early childhood relative to early childhood development. The chapter will now focus on how ECCE empowers children to develop to their full potential, through the lens of the supports offered to children and their families by ECCE.

2.4.1 Health promotion and early intervention

Health promotion empowers people to take control of their well-being (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2015). Such programmes in Ireland have witnessed the reduction of chronic disease and introduction of health-related policy (Health Service Executive [HSE], 2012). The Health Promotion Strategic Framework (HPSF) is an island-wide initiative (HSE, 2012) to improve Ireland's general health. It enables pre-schools to become 'healthy schools' to improve the holistic well-being of stakeholders.

Although most 9-year-olds experience mostly positive life outcomes, a considerable social gradient exists in terms of inequality (Williams et al., 2009). The average quality-of-life score in Ireland is 8.3 out-of-ten, while respondents in the lower classes rated their quality-of-life as 3.7 out-of-ten (Borooah, Dineen & Lynch, 2011). Additionally 36.2% of children aged 0-17 in Ireland were living in

consistent poverty in 2011 (CSO, 2013). Social disadvantage profoundly affects children's well-being, development, quality-of-life and child-parent bonds (Hilliard, 2013; Williams et al., 2009). Thus a major feature of the HSPF is to address health inequalities (HSE, 2012) affected by socio-economic status.

Prevention and early intervention programmes (PEIPs) within ECCE are evidence-based programmes (McClorley, Quinn & Kelly, 2012) aiming to improve the well-being of children and their families by breaking the cycle of social disadvantage (DES, 2014). In Ireland, PEIPs include Barnardos' Tús Maith Programme (Barnardos, n. d.) and the Bringing it All Back Home Programme (Hilliard, 2013). They offer childcare assistance and educational programmes teaching parents how to model positive behaviour for their children and strengthen their parenting skill-base.

PEIP programmes strive to achieve equal outcomes for all children by identifying those not reaching their educational potential before they start school (DES, 2014; McClorley et al, 2012). The need for later social service intervention is also reduced by PEIPs (Harvey, 2014; Karoly, Kilburn & Cannon, 2005) PEIPs deliver services aiming to promote the growth and development of the child in key developmental areas (Karoly et al., 2005; McClorley, et al., 2012) including literacy, enhancing social/emotional development (McClorley et al., 2012), and educating families about the importance of good nutrition. Childhood development post-birth is strongly predicted by quality parent-child attachment and correct nutrition (Harvey, 2014). The chapter will now focus on the role of practitioners in supporting parents regarding childhood.

2.4.2 Partnerships with parents

The benefits of ECCE for young children, families and society are plentiful. The Free Pre-School Year has made ECCE more accessible (Corbett, 2012), while the cost of PEIPs available within ECCE are lower than later intervention through the justice system (Harvey, 2014). However, from previous discussion it is clear that a strong, mutually beneficial parent-practitioner relationship is vital to ensure positive early childhood experiences in pre-school.

Practitioners can offer parents support concerning childhood health and well-being, including advice on illness and nutrition. Appropriate nutrition is extremely important regarding children's developmental outcomes (Harvey, 2014). Breastfeeding and weaning are excellent examples of how parents can be supported by ECCE practitioners. Ireland's breastfeeding rate is 55.4% - Europe's lowest (Economic and Social Research Institute [ESRI], 2013). Breast milk contains the correct nutrient balance and supports cognitive development (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). However successful breastfeeding of infants is conditional on support mothers receive (Leahy-Warren, Mulcahy, Phelan, & Corcoran, 2014). Parents, especially mothers, *must* receive as much support as possible while breastfeeding. Weaning, on the other hand, usually occurs when the baby is 6 months old. Weaning too soon can increase the risk of babies developing allergies or infections (HSE, 2013). Thus ECCE practitioners can offer support and advice to parents on these topics, using theoretical knowledge intertwined with their own professional experience of early childhood nutrition. Breakfast clubs present a wonderful opportunity to strengthen parent-practitioner relationships.

2.5 Breakfast Clubs

Breakfast clubs offer a combination of health promotion, early intervention and the chance to strengthen parent-practitioner partnerships. Breakfast clubs support families through breakfast provision in a safe, welcoming environment (HFfA, 2012; Shemilt et al., 2003), endeavouring to combat hunger and breakfast skipping (Foley, 2011). They aim to promote the formation of healthy eating habits, offer family support by addressing childcare issues and provide direct nutritional support to children (Street & Kenway, 1999). Numerous breakfast club models exist, such as the tea-and-toast model or community-led breakfast clubs (HFfA, 2012).

While breakfast clubs have received criticism for interfering in domestic family life and placing higher demands on staff (Children's Food Trust, 2008), research exists in their favour. Parents of breakfast club attendees were less likely to report

incidences of their child skipping breakfast than non-attendees (Bartfeld & Ryu, 2011). Furthermore attendance helps improve punctuality and pre-school participation, reduces instances of short-term hunger and supports social skills development (Children's Food Trust, 2008; HFfA, n.d., Street & Kenway, 1999). In Ireland only 12.5% of primary schools facilitate such a club, while there is no central database of ECCE settings implementing a breakfast club (Foley, 2011). This makes it difficult to establish whether or not the service is common practice on a national level. However, a pilot programme to measure the success of breakfast clubs has been established.

2.5.1 The Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs

The Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs (PPBC) was established to address food poverty and encourage children to foster positive breakfast consumption habits (HFfA, n.d.). PPBC witnessed improved overall attendance rates and punctuality, higher willingness of children to participate in class and improved energy levels in children (HFfA, n.d.). PPBC was successful in implementing its objectives also, as the breakfast club facilitators involved in the study noted a positive change in the eating habits of the children – they were eating a wholesome breakfast regularly, in addition to new foods not eaten at home.

However, challenges arose; funding was the main barrier to breakfast club implementation because breakfast-specific funding does not exist (HFfA, n.d.). Furthermore practitioners were unaware of what constituted as good practice regarding parental engagement (HFfA, n.d.). It is recommended that parents should be viewed as stakeholders and therefore involved in many aspects of the breakfast club, including the initial planning, establishment and even participating in the breakfast club by eating with their child (HFfA, 2012), although this aspect of the breakfast club has received criticism, as previously mentioned. Furthermore parental involvement in breakfast clubs may also provide them with more knowledge regarding the benefits good nutrition yields for children and can even build solid parent-practitioner affiliations.

2.6 Benefits of Good Nutrition

Health is a state of social, mental and physical well-being, rather than being free of disease (Department of Health [DoH], 2013). Nutrition is a fundamental determinant of health – particularly within early childhood development (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). A healthy, balanced diet will provide children with essential nutrients responsible for the management of bodily functions (Marotz, 2012; Porter, 2013), aid bodily growth (SafeFood, 2015) and contribute to good health generally.

2.6.1 Breakfast

Breakfast is typically consumed after an extended period of sleep or rest - up to 14 hours for some – accounting for up to 25% of one’s daily nutrient intake (Affinita et al., 2013; Porter, 2013; O’Brien, 2013). However, it is crucial to realise that the *type* of breakfast consumed will determine one’s quality of health. Thus the food pyramid (Appendix A) should be used to guide menu-planning.

A child-specific food pyramid exists (Appendix B) which should be used exclusively for planning children’s meals in ECCE settings. This helps to ensure that meals and snacks are nutritionally balanced. Meal-planning for young children can be difficult, especially in the case of children who are picky eaters or prefer the taste of a limited amount of food (Sturley-Pope, 2012). Thus the child-specific food pyramid (Appendix B) is useful because it lists various examples of foods that young children should be eating, to ensure a balanced diet and prevent diet-related problems arising. These may include anaemia or constipation which are common issues amongst children in Ireland (Sturley-Pope, 2012). In some cases, anaemia can result in low concentration, irritability and behavioural issues (Sturley-Pope, 2012). This bears negative consequence on children’s well-being.

2.6.2 Breakfast and children’s well-being

Research exists illustrating the positive effects that regular, healthy breakfast consumption has on children’s behaviour and nutritional status (DoHC, 2003).

Breakfast is a nutritional boost (SafeFood, 2011). The National Children's Food Survey (SafeFood, 2011) noted that children's lunches tended to be higher in sugar and salt than breakfast, which contained more essential nutrients due to the consumption of fortified breakfast cereals. Additionally consuming breakfast can improve overall nutritional intake, cognitive functioning and lower the child's risk of obesity (Foley, 2011; Hoyland, McWilliams, Duff & Walton, 2012; Graham, Russo, Blackledge & Defeyter, 2014).

Cognitive development is classified as the evolution of a person's mental aptitude, thought and decision-making processes as they age (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). As aforementioned, breakfast is typically eaten after a long period of fasting. The brain relies on glucose for energy, levels of which become low in the brain during fasting periods (Foley, 2011). Therefore eating a nutritionally balanced breakfast helps to replenish glucose stores, restoring energy lost during sleep (Foley, 2011; Rampersaud, Pereira, Girard, Adams, & Metz, 2005). Hence this allows the brain to re-equilibrate, resuming its highest calibre of cognitive functioning (Porter, 2013).

In a study of Kindergarten children, those who ate breakfast regularly had considerably higher intelligence quotient (IQ) test scores in comparison to their peers who did not frequently eat breakfast (Liu, Hwang, Dickerman, & Compher, 2013). These findings are consistent with results of previous studies (Bartfeld & Ryu, 2011; Gibson & Gunn, 2011). Hence it is true to say that breakfast consumption on a regular basis will positively affect cognitive development, regardless of factors such as gender or parental occupation (Liu et al., 2013).

In addition to promoting a higher intake of essential nutrients and improving cognition, research links a better metabolic profile to regular, healthy breakfast consumption (Affinita et al., 2013). Thus children who consume breakfast regularly tend to face less health complications including obesity or diabetes. Obesity is a serious health condition where there is too much fat on the body (WHO, 2015). According to the WHO (2015) 42 million under-fives worldwide were in the overweight or obese category in 2013. In Ireland, 19% of 3-year-old

children are overweight, and 6% obese according to the 2012 Growing up in Ireland study (Growing Up in Ireland [GUI], 2012). Children in the overweight/obese category tended to come from lower-ranking social classes. Thus at this point the value of health promotion and PEIPs must be remembered; they aim to reduce this inequality and long-term implications of childhood health issues. Furthermore, according to GUI (2012), infants who were breast-fed were less likely to become overweight or obese.

According to the Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition (SLÁN) in Ireland 2007 (Harrington et al., 2008) excess calories in the diet were mostly from the consumption of foods high in fat, salt and sugar. While fruit and vegetable consumption has risen (Harrington et al., 2008), research has illustrated a correlation in the rise of type 2 diabetes and higher obesity rates (HSE, 2008) - illnesses influenced by dietary habits. Additionally the National Taskforce on Obesity found childhood obesity prevalent in Ireland in 2005 (HSE, 2005), still prevalent in 2012 (GUI, 2012).

Research suggests that non-consumption of breakfast can contribute to childhood obesity. By avoiding breakfast, children's appetites are unstable which can result in the overconsumption of high-energy foods later in the day. In one study children who skipped breakfast felt considerably hungrier and less full, wishing to consume more food (particularly high-energy food) before lunch than they normally would (Kral, Whiteford, Heo, & Faith, 2011). Thus it is true to say that breakfast eaters are less likely to snack mid-morning or during the day than their breakfast-skipping counterparts (Dubois, Girard, Potvin, Farmer & Tatone-Tokuda, 2008). Therefore research advocates for regular, healthy breakfast consumption as it contributes to general good health. The next section examines breakfast skipping.

2.7 Breakfast Skipping

Despite the positive outcomes that breakfast consumption yields for child health and well-being, skipping breakfast is still highly prevalent (Affinita et al., 2013).

In Ireland, the Irish Health Behaviour of School-aged Children Study [HBSC] (2010) revealed that nearly 13% of children skip breakfast completely on weekdays, while 21% have attended school hungry (Kelly, Gavin, Molcho & Nic Gabhainn, 2012).

Internationally 10-30% of individuals skip breakfast regularly in the USA and throughout Europe; children skip breakfast most frequently (Rampersaud et al., 2005). Alarming, data from the UK states that 33% of young children who skip breakfast do not eat anything at all until lunchtime (Hoyland et al., 2012). While it might be argued that research regarding the effects of breakfast skipping on children's appetite is contradictory (Kral et al., 2011), it is undeniable that skipping breakfast results in considerably hungrier children. The long-term implication of regular breakfast skipping could result in children struggling to change their meal-skipping habits (Kral et al., 2011) in their adult life. Therefore it is clear to see how breakfast clubs can play an important role in helping children to avoid skipping breakfast habitually, while simultaneously supporting their families. There are various reasons why children may skip breakfast. Parents in particular may find it extremely difficult to provide breakfast daily for their children, for a number of reasons.

2.7.1 Why skip breakfast?

Studies correlate breakfast-skipping with a lack of appetite in the morning, stressful family mealtimes or an unstable morning routine (Condon, 2010; Foley, 2011; HFfA, 2012). In fact, a study of the breakfast consumption habits of Italian children found that 22% skipped breakfast; 62% did so because of a lack of time in the morning, while 38% were not hungry early in the morning (Vanelli et al., 2005). Although breakfast skipping is prevalent across all income gradients (Bartfeld & Ryu, 2011), the 2010 HBSC study illustrated the statistically significant differences regarding the prevalence of breakfast skipping among factors such as gender, age and socio-economic status (Kelly et al., 2012).

2.7.2 Busy schedules

Evidence suggests that the benefits of eating meals as a family are plentiful (Fulkerson, Kubik, Story, Lytle & Arcan, 2009); children who consume breakfast at home are more likely to report a dietary intake that is more nutrient rich than those who do not consume breakfast (Fulkerson et al., 2009; Utter, Scragg, NíMhurchu & Schaaf, 2007). However this is not always feasible amongst families headed by working parents.

Employment rates are rising; in the second quarter of 2015 the rate had risen by 3%, which is significant when the second quarter of 2014 is considered – employment rates rose by only 1.7% in the same time-frame last year (CSO, 2015). Significantly, 1 in 8 Irish families are lone-parent families; 58% of lone-parents work (One Family, n. d.). Thus, with a higher percentage of parents working, busy schedules and a resulting lack of time in the morning can account for breakfast skipping thus missing the family meal time which is so beneficial (Affinita et al., 2013; Fulkerson et al., 2009).

Therefore the breakfast club in pre-schools can be used by parents in this situation. Parents know that their child will receive their morning meal in a safe, home-like environment (Shemilt et al., 2003), which is a reassuring support.

2.7.3 Socio-economic factors

As aforementioned, children in Ireland have gone to school hungry – younger children and those from lower social classes are most at-risk of this experience (Kelly et al., 2012; Sheehan, 2013). A lack of food in the household - food poverty - refers to denied access to sufficient food needed to sustain a healthy lifestyle, due to a lack of income (Van Wye, Seoh, Adjoian & Dowell, 2013; Widome, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Haines & Story, 2009). Food poverty is a cause for concern in Irish public social policy. 10% of the population experienced food poverty in 2010 (Carney & Maître, 2012). Being subjected to food poverty can influence one's health, social behaviour and can even intensify social exclusion (Friel & Conlon, 2004). Furthermore, childhood food poverty and consequential malnutrition can have lasting implications, such as health problems

later in life relating to impaired cognitive or physical development (Friel & Conlon, 2004).

Research shows that higher-quality diets are generally consumed by those of a higher social gradient (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008), while those of a lower socio-economic status are more likely to consume unhealthy, energy-dense diets. The 2010 HBSC (Kelly et al., 2012) study illustrates the social gradient that exists regarding diet and health; children from higher social rankings reported their health as excellent which is a stark contrast when compared to their counterparts from lower class groups. Regarding food consumption, the study found that 35% of boys from the highest social class consumed fruit more than once a day, while this figure stood at 25% for those from the lowest social classes. Additionally, 26% of girls from the highest social class consumed sweets and soft drinks regularly, but the figure stood at 35% among the lower social class. Thus socio-economic status can influence immensely on breakfast consumption with instances of food poverty inhibiting the frequency of consumption and the breakfast menu available to children.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the importance of nutrition and the advantages of forming good nutritional habits in early childhood. In accordance with the research topic, early childhood nutrition was explored, intertwined with the advantages of attending the breakfast club offered by ECCE services as a form of PEIP and parental support. The barriers faced by parents regarding breakfast provision have been explored also. The next chapter will present the methodological choice undertaken to collect data.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research intends to discover the extent to which nutrition in the early years is valued, the benefits of breakfast club attendance for young children and barriers parents face impeding children's breakfast consumption. This chapter outlines the research paradigm, design and data collection, the sample, ethical considerations, data analysis and limitations.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm guides methodological choice, encircling one's fundamental thought process which directs thinking during the research process (Mukherji & Albon, 2010; Wisker, 2008). The positivist and interpretivist research approaches are two chief paradigms within the social sciences (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Positivism believes that the world is measurable – results of such research are not subjective (Wisker, 2008). It uses quantitative research methods, to produce measurable, unchanging data; duplicate results are desired to ensure study reliability. Therefore positivism is unsuitable for this study.

Consequently the guiding paradigm of this research is interpretivistic; accepting that what we believe to be true is subjective according to individual experience and cultural context (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). It is the subjective nature of the chosen paradigm which aligns it to the research topic. Information is gathered qualitatively (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). The research aims to discover how a service provided by Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings affects service users, the results of which cannot be duplicated because individual human experience is unique. Therefore the interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to gather such data, providing a rich understanding of the experiences of various stakeholders' outlooks on the research topic.

3.3 Research Approach

In any piece of research ‘well-formulated design questions provide the bedrock of good studies, informing all other aspects’ (Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O’Connor & Barnard, 2014, p. 276). The aforementioned research aims thus dictate that the most suitable research approach used during this study is qualitative.

Qualitative data ‘offers a richness and depth of detail in the information’ gathered (Picardi & Masick, 2014, p. 140). Therefore this research methodology does not rely solely on statistics; rather it produces smaller amounts of detailed information, allowing for in-depth analysis (Punch, 2007; Roberts-Holmes, 2011). Although in practice, qualitative research collection and analysis is time-consuming (Picardi & Masick, 2014), the researcher can gather real-life experiences of primary stakeholders. Therefore a richness of lived-experience simply not obtained via quantitative means is gathered.

Furthermore, qualitative research collects personal, subjective data (Cottrell, 2014; Denscombe, 2007), in a naturalistic context (Horn, 2009). Thus the researcher can gather a broad, real-life account of how the breakfast club affects relevant service users/providers; children, their parents and ECCE practitioners. It is the broad number of individuals from which qualitative data is collected that gives this study its legitimacy (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). Furthermore, qualitative data collection is not a linear process. In fact a linear research model can become constraining (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). Within flexible research methodologies, design emerges during data collection (Maxwell, 2013), preventing the study from becoming stagnant or unproductive.

3.4 Research Design

The chapter has so far discussed the rationale persuading the methodological choice, emphasising why qualitative methodology is suited to this study. As aforementioned, the research aims form the foundation of research, informing data collection choices. Examples of qualitative methods include case studies,

interviews, focus groups and observations (Cottrell, 2014). The methods chosen for this study are outlined as follows.

3.4.1 Research methods

The study employs a mixed qualitative methodological approach. Although the mixed-method research approach traditionally uses qualitative *and* quantitative data collection methods in one study, similar ideologies are applied to the mixed qualitative approach (Ritchie & Ormston, 2014). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are used in this study. They are complementary in their efforts to gain a holistic overview of participant opinions. However, each method is tailored specifically to the research participants, to collect a uniquely rich insight into the research topic (Ritchie & Ormston, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews equip the interviewer with a clear list of issues and questions to be answered - but they are flexible regarding topic discussion sequence and the interviewee (ECCE practitioners) may develop broader ideas on topics (Denscombe, 2007). This switches the focus from researcher to participant, allowing the participant to share their own experience on the research topic (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). This research method is most suited to practitioners. They can use their professional experience and theoretical knowledge-base to divulge the efficiency of the breakfast club at enhancing parent-practitioner relationships, as a health promotion strategy and the developmental implications for children regarding nutrition. Furthermore, practitioners' outlooks are useful to compare with parental views, regarding barriers to breakfast provision for example. Parents' views stem from the focus group element of the mixed qualitative research methodology.

Focus groups, the latter part of the mixed methodology, are small groups brought together by the researcher to explore attitudes, feelings and ideas regarding a specified topic. As its namesake suggests, sessions are focused and group discussion is important. The researcher's role is to facilitate the group's interaction (Denscombe, 2007).

In this study the focus groups will concern two relevant stakeholders; parents and children using the breakfast club service. Parents are most capable at deconstructing the potential barriers faced regarding breakfast provision and how they overcome these real-life barriers. The group format of this method is useful - a range of different viewpoints can be gathered simultaneously. Children were chosen to participate for a number of reasons. Children are consumers in their own right; they avail of the breakfast club menu. Therefore the study will be informed first-hand of the food and the experience of attending the club. Children also deserve to have their voices heard. Participation gives children autonomy over their input into the study. The study also promotes inclusive practice and empowers younger citizens to have their say by inviting children to partake (Roberts-Holmes, 2011).

The children's focus group is child-friendly. It is the most suitable data collection method for younger participants because children are often wary of the prospect of an unknown adult seeking their opinion, in an interview-like situation (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). The quality of data can be hindered as a result. Thus an interview is *not* child-friendly in any way. The implementation of a child-friendly focus group results in numerous strengths for the study; children are familiar with the other focus group participants and they are also familiar with the group situation, from aspects of their daily routine such as Circle Time. As a result children are more comfortable with what is expected of them during the child focus groups and may feel more confident providing their opinions and answers (Roberts-Homes, 2011). From tailoring the child focus group to meet the needs of the children, the researcher is able to gather the viewpoints of children who avail of the breakfast club service, which is extremely important, and thus gain a general consensus of the service's success. This intertwines with the research questions.

3.4.2 Research instruments

Once the research methodology was definite, three sets of research instruments were devised – tailored to each stakeholder group. An access letter was firstly sent to pre-school managers (gatekeepers), requesting permission to carry out research in their setting (Appendix C). The researcher thought the key aim of the

study and what participation would entail would be conveyed most effectively by preparing information packs for each participant, thus empowering participants to make an informed decision regarding participation. Information packs were sent once the gatekeepers granted access.

i. Semi-structured interview information pack

- Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D)
- Participant Consent Form (Appendix E)
- Proposed Interview Schedule (Appendix F)

The interview schedule was derived from the research aims. This is paramount because the research aims form the foundations of any study (Spencer et al., 2014). Questions address structural, developmental issues and parental involvement levels. Furthermore, the schedule contains a Likert scale-based question (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). In this case the scale is numeral, used to gain an overview of practitioner attitudes regarding breakfast clubs and developmental implications, which can then be explored. This is useful to gain an understanding of the attitudes of practitioners regarding the breakfast club as a useful health-based intervention strategy that is beneficial for children.

ii. Parent focus group information pack

- Participant Information Sheet (Appendix G)
- Participant Consent Form (Appendix H)
- Proposed Focus Group Schedule (Appendix I)

Pressing issues in the schedule included the benefits of breakfast clubs, barriers preventing children from eating a healthy breakfast daily, how these barriers are overcome and the relationship that parents have with their child's pre-school/crèche, all from a parental perspective. These topics bear relevance to the research aims; the researcher is able to gather not only the barriers faced by parents regarding meal provision, but what is done in real-life to overcome them. Furthermore the agenda also enables the researcher to gather a general perception

regarding the rating of breakfast and parental awareness of the consequences of breakfast skipping.

iii. Child focus group information pack

The children taking part in this study are below the age of 18, therefore it was their parents who received an information pack and gave consent on the child's behalf.

- Participant Information Sheet (Appendix J)
- Participant Consent Form (Appendix K)
- Proposed Focus Group Schedule (Appendix L)

The focus group schedule for the children seeks to gather the child's opinion of the breakfast club, what it means to them and how important they think breakfast is. The designated activity gathers further insight into what children perceive as fit or unfit to consume at breakfast time (See Appendix M for pictures of the activity tools). The activity also questions why the children have placed each food into the healthy or unhealthy side, which allows the researcher to gather further subjective information regarding the attitudes of children towards breakfast. The next section will deconstruct the sample of participants.

3.5 Sampling

In any piece of research the participants are called the sample (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). Choosing the correct research participants can determine the success and validity of the entire study (Picardi & Masick, 2014). Choosing the sample – sampling – is an extremely important process.

3.5.1 Sample size

Data was collected from eight ECCE settings that provided breakfast for service users (see Appendix N, Appendix O & Appendix P for interview and focus group transcriptions). Setting managers (gatekeepers) were contacted first in order to gain permission to carry out research (Appendix C). Once permission was granted, information packs were sent to practitioners (Table 1), parents (Table 2)

and parents of children to take part (Table 3). Thus emergent data derives from 32 sources:

- 16 practitioner interviews

Job Title	Manager	Pre-school Leader	Childcare Practitioner
Participants	6	5	5
Total			16

Table 1: Childcare Practitioner Participant Profile

- 8 parent focus groups

Venue	Number of Parents	Length of Focus Group (Minutes:Seconds)
1	6	30:45
2	7	35:28
3	6	40:58
4	6	30:11
5	6	31: 34
6	8	45:08
7	6	30:05
8	7	48:17

Table 2: Parent Focus Group Composition

- 8 child focus groups

Venue	Number of Children	Length of Focus Group (Minutes:Seconds)
1	6	17:47
2	7	16:56
3	6	14:58
4	6	15:31
5	6	15:13
6	5	25:25
7	6	16:17
8	7	21:18

Table 3: Child Focus Group Composition

3.5.2 Sample selection process

Sampling is determined by the research approach; qualitative in this case. Thus the non-probability sampling method underpinned research participant selection, because it is determined by the scope of the research (Battaglia, 2011; Roberts-Holmes, 2011). There are three popular non-probability sampling methods; quota sampling, purposive sampling and convenience sampling (Battaglia, 2011). In relation to this piece of research, the sample was recruited using the purposive and convenience sampling methods.

As the name suggests, purposive sampling finds participants deliberately because they have the qualities and characteristics to obtain the best and most relevant detail possible (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant, & Rahim, 2014). In the case of this study, the sample criteria ensured practitioners were involved in the breakfast club, while parents and children had to be users of the club.

On the other hand, convenience sampling, used during initial sample recruitment, proved useful. The researcher used existing connections to a number of familiar ECCE settings. However, this method was used to commence the data collection

process with ease; convenience sampling was not heavily relied upon during the study because it is not as deliberate a process as purposive sampling (Roberts-Holmes, 2011) which could possibly void the sample regarding suitability.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Researchers must uphold their duties to ensure participants' best interests remain uncompromised during data collection (Sociological Association of Ireland [SAI], 2014). To ensure the ethical honesty of the project, the researcher was familiar with the Dublin Institute of Technology Research Ethics Guidelines (DITREG) (Dublin Institute of Technology [DIT], 2015) throughout the entire data collection process. The study received ethical clearance prior to fieldwork.

Primary ethical issues include ensuring participants were informed regarding their partaking in the study, data collection from less powerful participants and ensuring confidentiality is maintained throughout the entire research process (Punch, 2007). Therefore participants were fully informed about all aspects of the study and were given a timeframe in which they could decide to take part. Informed consent is paramount in any participant's decision to take part; researchers actually have a duty of care towards participants to ensure they are fully informed (DIT, 2015).

In regards to collecting data from less powerful participants, research tools were designed age-appropriately. Data collected from children was done so in a safe environment in which the well-being and safety of children was of paramount importance, in the presence of familiar ECCE practitioners. Additionally, consent was obtained from the child's parents/guardians, adhering to the DITREG (DIT, 2015). To ensure confidentiality was maintained throughout the entire research process, all data and consent forms obtained as part of the process were kept in a locked file to which only the researcher has access. They will be destroyed when the research is completed.

3.7 Data Collection Process

Initial contact was made with gatekeepers via telephone, after which a master list was compiled. Once a suitable date for data collection was arranged, participants received their respective information packs and were given a week-long cooling off period in which they could decide to withdraw their decision to participate. Data analysis occurred once collection was completed.

3.7.1 Data analysis

Data analysis is used to identify the themes gathered during the data collection process. The data analysis framework employed by this project involves raw data interpretation by grouping the results of the data into common emergent themes, through coding, categorisation and triangulation amongst the themes (Denscombe, 2007; Roberts-Holmes, 2011). The Literature Review chapter is useful during this part of data analysis, because the information gathered during the research process can be compared to what other scholars are writing about the topic. This is useful also in relation to the representation of the data in the final report. Raw data was transcribed from its audio format. During data collection the name of the speaker was recorded in the researcher’s field notes. Names were removed during transcription and participant tags assigned. Each venue was also given a number and assigned a colour (Table 4).

Venue Number	Venue Tag	Practitioner 1 Tag	Practitioner 2 Tag	Child Group Tag	Parent Group Tag
1	V(1)	V(1)P(1)	V(1)P(2)	V(1)Child(_)	V(1)Parent(_)
2	V(2)	V(2)P(1)	V(2) P(2)	V(2)Child(_)	V(2)Parent(_)
3	V(3)	V(3)P(1)	V(3)P(2)	V(3)Child(_)	V(3)Parent(_)
4	V(4)	V(4)P(1)	V(4)P(2)	V(4)Child(_)	V(4)Parent(_)
5	V(5)	V(5)P(1)	V(5)P(2)	V(5)Child(_)	V(5)Parent(_)
6	V(6)	V(6)P(1)	V(6)P(2)	V(6)Child(_)	V(6)Parent(_)
7	V(7)	V(7)P(1)	V(7)P(2)	V(7)Child(_)	V(7)Parent(_)
8	V(8)	V(8)P(1)	V(8)P(2)	V(8)Child(_)	V(8)Parent(_)

Table 4: Coding System

Emergent themes were grouped together post-coding. Significant, recurring themes were identified. The themes were deemed significant through the process of triangulation (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). In other words, similar themes emerged from each interview and focus group and therefore were deemed as valid and significant to the research results.

3.8 Limitations

3.8.1 Data collection limitations

Recruitment of parent samples proved difficult during this study. Most, if not all of the parents who took part in the study are working full-time. Therefore it was difficult to find parents who had the time to take part. Thus parent groups occurred mostly in the evenings to facilitate parents.

3.8.2 Methodological limitations

Focus groups are useful to gather a range of perspectives in one sitting (Denscombe, 2007), although distinguishing individuals is difficult (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). Thus focus group participants received a name tag. Speakers' names were recorded in the field work, which corresponded to the raw audio clips. For ethical reasons said field work was destroyed once data transcription was completed. Additionally individuals in focus groups can lead themselves to be influenced by others in their views (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). Thus the researcher used their role as focus group moderator to tease out a range of varied opinions regarding discussion topics (Denscombe, 2007) and to avoid discussion becoming stagnant or irrelevant.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework undertaken by this study to gather data. The methodology was justified in terms of its suitability to the research topic. Chapter four will discuss the outcomes of data collected using the above methodological framework.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the fieldwork results under broad themes derived from data analysis; the current outlook on nutrition within the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) field, breakfast clubs and health promotion, their contribution to child development and the influence of club attendance on parent-practitioner relationships. Themes will present views from each participant group, where applicable, lending to the study unique qualitative richness¹. The coding process outlined in the previous chapter demonstrates how participants were identified during data analysis. Accordingly this identification system will be used throughout this chapter.

4.2 Outlook on Nutrition

Generally nutrition was positively received. Settings implemented a healthy eating policy, acting as the prevailing guide to meal times and food. The healthy eating policy was highly regarded; settings were keen to revise policy to keep it up-to-date.

'...a healthy eating policy [is] in place... meals and snack times are held in high esteem...a really important time of the day... children can get the chance to explore food and grow to love a range of different foods and also develop...healthy eating habits that will be with them all their lives...'
V(5)P(1)

'...we would revise [nutrition policy] regularly too which is really important, especially when new laws or regulations come in. I suppose in our nutrition policy we have tried to explain the importance of healthy eating...' V(2)P(1)

¹ The study collected data from a wide range of sources, thus due to word count restrictions it was not possible to include every desired quotation in this chapter. Refer to Appendices N, O and P for further quotations relative to the emergent themes outlined throughout this chapter

4.2.1 Attitudes toward breakfast

Overall a positive attitude towards breakfast consumption exists. Practitioners speaking from professional experience acknowledged breakfast as bearing significant importance in a child's diet.

'...I have always said and always felt that breakfast is a super important meal. Children need this nourishment to give them energy to enjoy a fun filled day...in the crèche. This nourishment is also really important to feed their brains and boost metabolism' V(2)P(1)

'From working with young children for so long I can tell when they haven't eaten...they're more irritable, they don't want to participate in the activities say like in Montessori' V(1)P(1)

Additionally breakfast was acknowledged as the most important meal of the day by parents. Some stated that eating breakfast regularly builds good metabolism as well as providing children with much-needed energy.

'Breakfast, I insist my children eat that more than anything else...it wakes up the body and mind...' V(1)Parent(3)

'I think that breakfast is such an important meal...it can affect eating patterns for the whole day. I think that children may pick at chocolate or snack-type foods if breakfast is missed. Also I think that eating breakfast regularly...well it's a good way to help create a healthy metabolism and...keep obesity levels down' V(8)Parent(2)

'...Breakfast is the most important meal of the day as they say...like I think it's good for the whole body, for the brain...the right kind of breakfast will boost the immune system and of course it helps keep the hunger at bay' V(3)Parent(2)

4.2.2 Nutritional practice

Serving superior food was of paramount importance across all settings. Children received nutritious, high-quality breakfasts, as noted by practitioners and children. Cereals/food high in sugar and fat were prohibited, as dictated by the nutrition policy.

'...there are many kinds of cereal available...there are different kinds of juices available...we have toast and rolls...in the policy it says that basically we stay away from sugary foods...we don't allow [children] to add sugar to breakfast cereals' V(6)P(2)

'...[our nutritional] policy would also outline the rules that include food hygiene and food safety...it's very important that children enjoy eating their food at their own pace...we would serve children cereal, followed by toast and fruit...never...any sugary cereals or cereals that are chocolate-based...' V(2)P(2)

'...we always have to take a bite of the fruit but that's ok cus I like the fruit in school!' V(3)Child(1)

'...we get milk in school here. [We]...pour our own milk... I have apples and grapes too cus I love them!' V(2)Child(3)

4.2.3 Breakfast and child well-being

Data analysis revealed a clear association between breakfast skipping and negative implications. This strand was evident across each stakeholder-group.

- Parents

'...my kids would never survive without breakfast. They would be cranky and off-form...' V(1)Parent(6)

'...if I don't get to eat in the morning food is all you think...so like I would imagine for children it's even harder to concentrate...' V(2)Parent(2)

- Practitioners

'...children who come into crèche without eating anything at all would be more unsettled. They can't seem to put their minds to anything...they are always more settled after they eat...children need to be emotionally and mentally ready to take on the challenges of the different tasks...and I think breakfast is a good way for them to prepare...' V(2)P(1)

'Generally I find it takes them a long time to get motivated and to participate in activities and sometimes they will still be cranky and still tired if they haven't eaten anything before coming into us...' V(4)P(1)

- Children

'...I feel grumpy...and really hungry if I don't eat my breakfast...'
V(4)Child(2)

'I feel a little more hungrier when I don't have my Rice Krispies...like when I'm in my school here I don't feel like playin' at all!' V(3)Child(6)

4.3 Health Promotion

Breakfast clubs offer wonderful opportunities for practitioners to attend to children individually. Children can tell stories and connect with their peers and practitioners and learn about good food and nutrition. This encourages desirable habit formation such as eating at the table collectively.

'Yes we sit and eat with the children...I feel that it encourages good eating practice for the children...' V(8)P(2)

'I love the morning breakfasts because it's a great way to help the children to settle into their day and hear their news from the night before...' V(2)P(2)

'...teacher sits with us and talks to us when it is breakfast time...I like it!'
V(3)Child(3)

'...the other boys and girls sit here like me and we can all see each other!'
V(4)Child(2)

4.3.1 Nutritional awareness of children

Children demonstrated a solid conceptual understanding between healthy and unhealthy foods. Some children said that their pre-school taught them about the two concepts. The game used in the child focus group offered children the chance to think about the definition of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' and their effects on the body, thus reinforcing this learning.

'I know [unhealthy is] bad cus we did it in pre-school!' V(6)Child(1)

'Apples are very healthy...teacher tells me that!' V(1)Child(5)

'If I had a lot of [chocolate buttons] I would get sick in my tummy!'
V(1)Child(3)

4.3.2 The breakfast club experience

Additionally, in terms of children's changing interweaving contexts, parents noticed children were more open to trying a range of foods at home as a result of them eating in their respective settings. Concerning the breakfast club, parents said that they noticed their children requesting breakfast foods extending beyond typical chocolate-based or artificially sweetened breakfast cereals.

'...pre-school children get to try new foods and different foods, like ones I might not buy at home just because they wouldn't be eaten...but recently I have noticed a change...Weetabix and bananas is the new favourite! And you know I was puzzled, but then I found out that's what they have at breakfast club...' V(3)Parent(2)

'...my kids are more willing to try new foods at home, because their friends are trying them in crèche at breakfast...' V(8)Parent(4)

4.4 Breakfast Clubs and Child Development

The breakfast club commonly allowed children to make autonomous, independent choices and self-serve; common strands which makes the breakfast club holistically beneficial for children.

4.4.1 Promoting independence

Children were required to get their own spoons and bowls from cupboards and clean up after themselves by placing these items in the sink once used in all settings.

'...[children] get their own bowl or spoon or plate...we also try and get the children to bring it back to the practitioner when they have finished. After the child does this it is evident to see how proud they are...' V(4)P(2)

'...I think it's so important that children learn to clean up after themselves...so not only do the children get to pick their own but they know that they must clear away their spot at the table when they are done...' V(2)P(2)

'Also children eat and drink on their own...so they grow more independent in the sense that they aren't relying on staff to feed them...' V(2)P(1)

Some settings operated a ‘helper system’, where a different child was picked daily to assist practitioners. Children were enthusiastic about this system; being chosen as the ‘helper’ appeared to be a highly sought after position amongst the children!

‘...the special helper always helps and pours...and they love the whole process’ V(8)P(1)

‘I love being Helper cus you get to help...’ V(3)Child(3)

In settings where a mixed aged group ate breakfast together, it was common for the older children to assist the younger ones.

‘They can all work as a little team together too during breakfast, the older children help the younger ones an awful lot which is lovely to see but it’s really really good for their social skills and empathy towards others and being able to understand others’ feelings...’ V(6)P(2)

4.4.2 Developmental benefits of breakfast club attendance

Practitioners believed that children attending the breakfast club were highly supported in their social, language and fine motor skills. A mixed result was obtained regarding emotional development.

Social Development (see Figure 2)

‘The age group that eats together is mixed...so when they are all sitting together at the table the younger ones can learn from the older ones, so it’s great because these social skills are being learned from their peers, and the younger children learn in a natural way just by being around the older ones...’ V(2)P(2)

‘...children learn different life skills during [breakfast] time, like learning how to sit and wait for something, taking turns like for example when more than one child wants to pour their juice they know that they need to share...’ V(3)P(2)

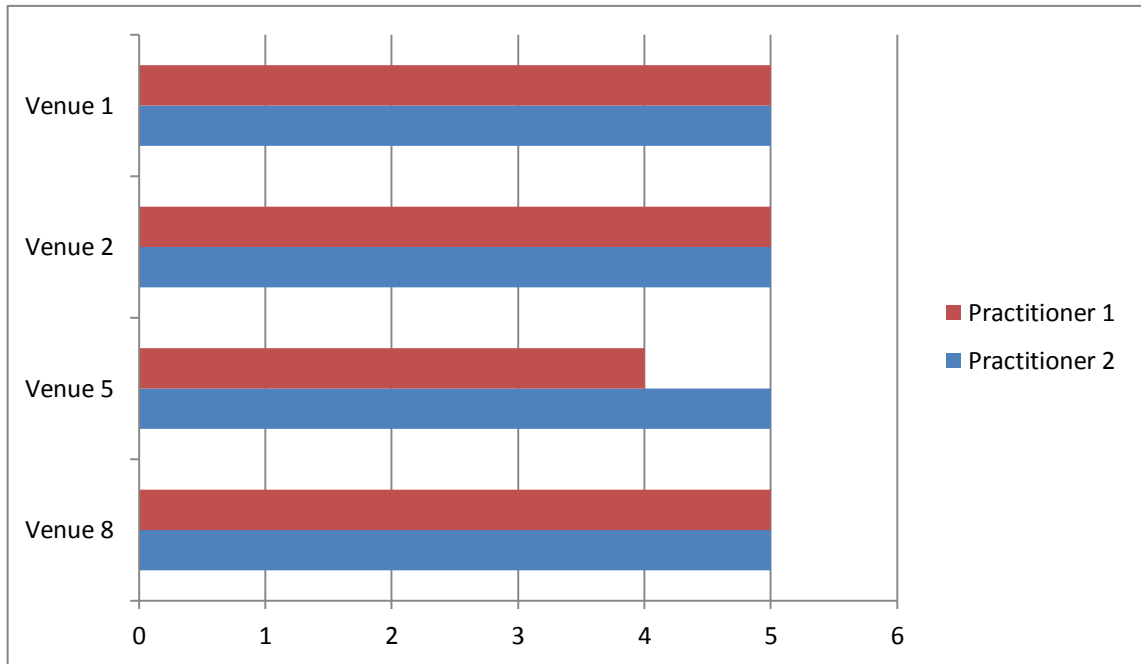


Figure 2: Breakfast Clubs and Social Development – Practitioner Views

Fine Motor Development

‘children ‘do it themselves’...as much as possible children would pour their own cereals and juice and milk...it’s great for their little fingers and it’s a great way for them to learn these skills properly’ V(6)P(1)

‘Because children are encouraged to do things independently I think that breakfast time promotes fine motor development in relation to skills such as holding the fork or spoon or feeding themselves with the cutlery and even the harder tasks like pouring a drink’ V(2)P(1)

Language Development

‘Language development happens throughout breakfast as each child is encouraged to participate in conversations’ V(4)P(2)

‘[Breakfast] is a fantastic time if everyone sits together to talk...that’s where the language is introduced...’ V(1)P(1)

Emotional Development (Figure 3)

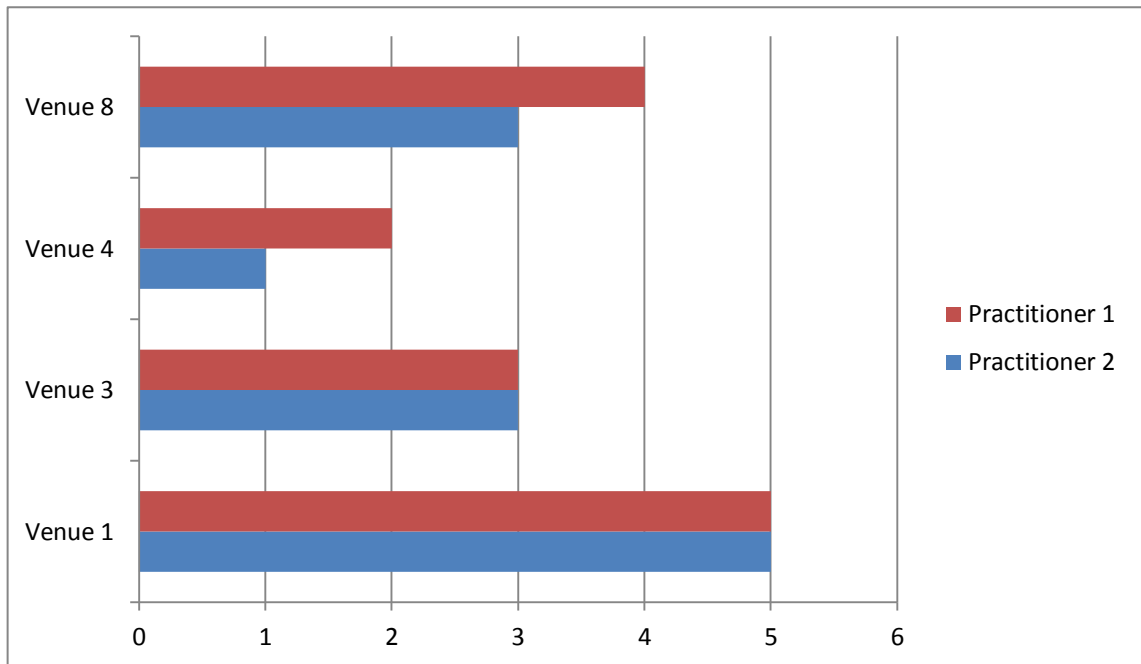


Figure 3: Breakfast Clubs and Emotional Development – Practitioner Views

'I gave this a 2 because I don't feel as though this is where a lot of emotional development happens, the children express how they feel, such as hungry or tired but it's usually more focused on the social aspect...' V(4)P(1)

'...it promotes the growth of the child's own personal independence. This is all linked to self-esteem and self-perception' V(2)P(1)

'Emotional development isn't something I'd associate with breakfast clubs...I suppose parting from parents?' V(7)P(1)

'... friendships are developed during meal-times through conversation and companionship through the whole group sitting together...' V(5)P(1)

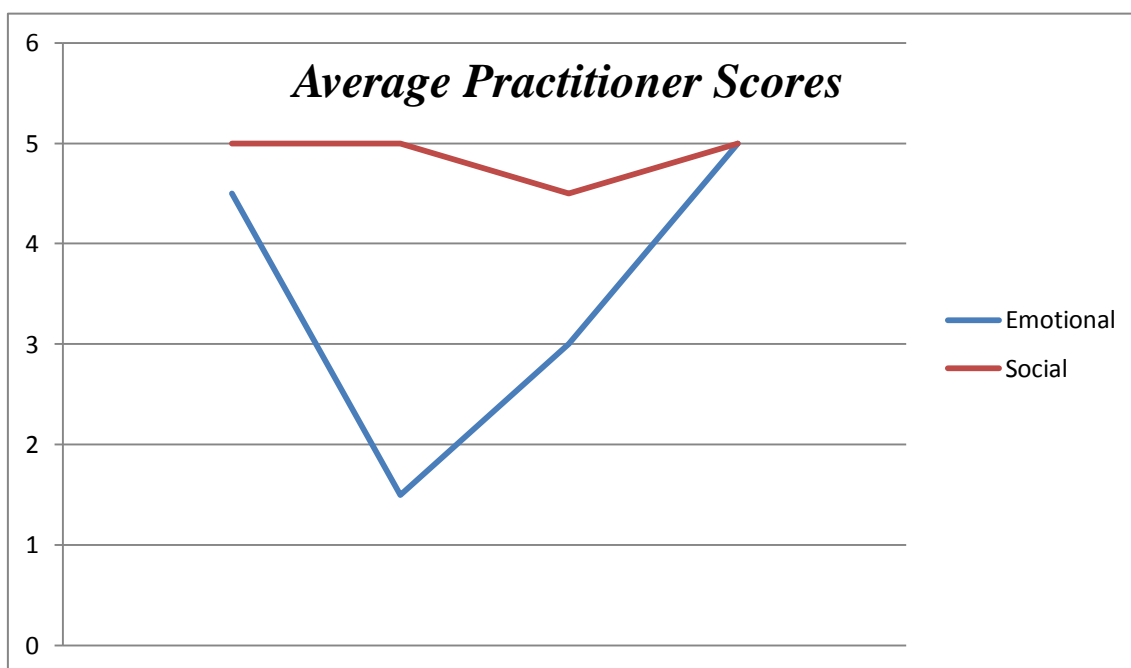


Figure 4: Comparison of Social and Emotional Likert Scale Scores

4.4.3 Attitudes of parents regarding shared meal-times

Parents agreed that shared family meal-times were very important. Some parents said that they tried to do this at least once a day and an awareness existing surrounding the beneficial outcomes.

'...eating together is really important for young children...In my family I would notice that my children get a lot out of us all sitting together, they learn how to self-serve, their social skills grow, their fine motor skills too...I think it's really important...' V(8)Parent(7)

'...meal times such as breakfast time are a great opportunity for social interaction...in my house I would always try and encourage the whole family to sit together around the table when we all eat...the TV gets switched off...' V(2)P(2)

'...it's better for young children with older siblings to sit together to get into the habit of eating breakfast. Meal-time is... 'family time' and young children may experiment with different tastes if the family is eating together...' V(5)Parent(2)

4.5 Partnerships with Parents

The general consensus gathered from parents was that a solid parent-practitioner relationship existed, but not exclusively because of the breakfast club. However some parents remarked that food was an easy conversation starter when they were *new* to the setting.

'I would have always felt supported by the staff here, even when my child didn't have their breakfast in the crèche...' V(2)Parent(2)

'...all in all I have always thought that the staff were great at supporting the parents...' V(3)Parent(3)

'I think that [food] was always a great conversation starter...especially when I was new to the service' V(3)Parent(1)

4.5.1 Why were the breakfast clubs initiated?

Breakfast clubs were established mainly to support working parents. They have been part of the settings for a number of years (Table 5).

Venue	Years the Breakfast Club has Operated	Since Opened	Setting
1	10	✓	
2	8		
3	10	✓	
4	5	✓	
5	9	✓	
6	8		
7	13		
8	10	✓	

Table 5: Operational Years of Respective Breakfast Clubs

'...we decided to start up the breakfast club here really to serve as an extra service to help out parents...it really grew from there!' V(2)P(2)

'...the breakfast club...it takes the pressure off me in the mornings too. Like I can drop the children....and I know that they will get a good healthy breakfast before they start their busy day...it's very reassuring'
V(2)Parent(2)

4.5.2 Parent views on the menu

Parents seemed to be generally aware of what their children received for breakfast. Most parents were satisfied with the breakfast menu and were enthusiastic in their opinions regarding the food.

'Yeah as far as I know they get something that is cereal and then they get toast or bagels? I know there's a policy about the foods...it's great because I think that a bowl of cereal just isn't enough on its own...I really like that they get milk or water...' V(3)Parent (1)

'...the crèche is good for involving parents...we all have seen the healthy eating policy...and menus are on display; I'm very happy with them!'
V(5)Parent(1)

4.5.3 Barriers for parents

Parents discussed numerous barriers which prevented them from providing a healthy breakfast daily. Financial pressures and time constraints were prevalent. Practitioners echoed their concerns.

'...money...and I know I speak for a lot of parents when I say that food shopping is difficult. The processed foods are so much cheaper than the healthy alternatives...I'd also find that sometimes my children just don't like the 'healthy' option...healthy versus tasty [doesn't] always go hand-in-hand...' V(8)Parent(4)

'...one of the problems is time...in the morning in my house, well I'd always feel that time is against us, especially when we're all trying to get out the door...I'm trying to get myself to work and the same with my partner as well...so breakfast will get neglected...' V(3)Parent(1)

'...I think that parents can sometimes be under pressure financially...there might not always be breakfast things in the house consistently...like [parents] can be more worried about trying to provide a hot meal...as a result breakfast can be overlooked...' V(5)P(2)

In regards to overcoming financial barriers, parents felt that food-specific government support to ECCE settings would help parents who felt they were struggling, whilst another overhauled their lifestyle in order to save money.

'The breakfast club should be supported more highly...I'd be lost without it...my wife lost her job recently...it's made things harder, but it's reassuring to know that the fee I am paying to [Crèche name] covers two meals – breakfast and a hot lunch...government funding needs to be allocated more fairly to pre-school meals...it would help...fees could go down??' V(4)Parent(6)

'...I recently started a new foody plan so I've overhauled me and my child's eating habits...ready-made food and breakfast bars and cereals for the kids were so expensive – now I home-make everything and I'm saving money. [Crèche name] has been so helpful too...getting recipes...' V(5)Parent(3)

Additionally being more organised seemed to ease the morning rush.

'...some mornings...we have loads of time...when the stuff is done the evening before...the bags are packed and clothes laid out...I don't always be in the mood to do that kind of thing...especially when...the sun's out I'd much rather bring the children out on their bikes or for a walk...!' V(3)Parent(1)

'...planning is key to ensuring [organisation] ...' V(2)Parent(1)

4.5.4 Volunteering during breakfast club

The overall agreement regarding parents volunteering during breakfast club was that it should not happen. However a small minority disagreed and the groups discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the issue.

'This would really depend on the parent...' V(1)Parent(1)

No to Volunteers

'No...breakfast clubs should only be used by parents who are not free to provide breakfast at that time...say for example because they are working, like I do...' V(5)Parent(6)

'No I don't think that parents should be allowed to volunteer...my child would not benefit from my presence in the room...she's quite independent and I really try to encourage this...' V(2)Parent(1)

Yes to Volunteers

'I think an element of parental volunteerism would be beneficial to the club...it would...provide the parent with further education around the importance of healthy eating...' V(4)Parent(3)

'I think that parents should be able to volunteer in the breakfast club...but clear boundaries need to be set...even possibly agreements signed. Some parents will feel they have a right to take over where their child is concerned...' V(8)Parent(7)

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the main themes which arose from research collection and data analysis. The next chapter will analyse the themes in relation to the existing literature within the field, in the context of the research questions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse the research findings to understand their possible implications for the Irish Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector. The study was driven by statistics indicating that in contemporary Ireland, 21% of children have gone to school hungry while 13% of children skip breakfast on weekdays (Kelly et al., 2012).

Consequently in a bid to understand *why* such statistics exist, the research aims to uncover the degree of importance placed on good nutrition for young children by the ECCE sector, the effectiveness of breakfast clubs as a health promotion strategy, the contribution of attending such clubs to childhood development and the factors inhibiting breakfast provision by parents. Throughout the chapter the fieldwork is discussed within the context of pre-existing, relevant literature.

5.2 Outlook on Nutrition

All of the settings that took part in the research implemented a policy specifically related to nutrition. It was common for practitioners to note that this policy was regularly revised and updated, and in most cases it formed the bedrock of the pre-school's entire practice regarding food provision to children. This illustrates the respect settings have for the Pre-School Regulations which underline the importance of ensuring children's well-being is paramount (DCYA, 2006) and promoting high standards of nutritious practices. This is important because, as mentioned previously, high standards of quality early childhood care proves extremely beneficial for children's development (OECD, 2006). Thus when settings implement an up-to-date, comprehensive policy, a minimum standard is put in place to which the entire setting can work towards.

Overall the information garnered from the study indicates that breakfast is highly regarded in terms of its importance across each stakeholder group. Interestingly, this attitude was most prevalent amongst the parent focus groups. Although the

research agenda did not specifically ask parents about their breakfast consumption habits, existing research reveals that 20% of adults skipped breakfast throughout the duration of a study by Gibson & Gunn (2011). Further research indicates that 10-30% of children skip breakfast regularly on an international scale (Rampersaud et al., 2005). However the results of **this** study reveal that, when it comes to *their* children, parents felt that consuming breakfast was of utmost importance and they felt that their children should consume breakfast daily. However the study illustrates that children do not always have the means to consume breakfast at home regularly; this will be discussed in-depth during the course of this chapter.

In terms of child well-being, ECCE practitioners spoke about the effect of breakfast skipping on children in terms of cognitive and emotional readiness to undertake tasks and participate in the pre-school session. When children did not eat anything for breakfast practitioners discussed how they appeared more irritable, disinterested in tasks and tired. According to the literature, breakfast consumption is vital because the energy gained from breakfast helps to re-equilibrate the brain and restore lost energy (Foley, 2011; Porter, 2013; Rampersaud, et al., 2005).

Furthermore breakfast consumption can improve cognitive development and can even boost the nutritional intake of a child's diet (Foley, 2011; Hoyland et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2014; SafeFood, 2011). Research states that regular breakfast consumption helps to boost mental aptitude in children when compared to children who consume breakfast less frequently (Liu et al., 2013). Thus the study shows that practitioners were advocates for breakfast consumption because from their experience they were able to discuss plenty of examples relative to the negative effects that breakfast skipping has for children.

5.3 Breakfast Clubs and Health Promotion

Health promotion is a tool of empowerment helping individuals to take control of their well-being (WHO, 2015). The Health Promotion Strategic Framework (HPSF), an Irish initiative (HSE, 2012), shows pre-schools how to gain 'healthy

school' status. This study illustrates how ECCE settings are undertaking health promotion strategies. Settings strive to provide only the highest quality foods, as indicated by nutritional policy and breakfast club menu.

Interestingly, breakfast foods high in fat and sugar were banned from every breakfast club involved. This proves beneficial to children's health; research by Harrington et al., (2008) notes that excessive amounts of fat, sugar and salt are prevalent in the Irish diet, which can contribute to childhood obesity. 19% of three-year-olds were classified as overweight in Ireland in 2012 (GUI, 2012; HSE, 2005). Likewise studies show how non-consumption of breakfast can contribute to childhood obesity; children who do not eat breakfast feel significantly hungrier during the day and thus are more prone to snacking on energy-dense food which often contains high levels of fat, sugar and salt (Dubois et al., 2008; Kral et al., 2011). Unfortunately, in Ireland there is no central database of settings with a breakfast club at present (Foley, 2011), making it difficult to establish where breakfast clubs are most likely to be located, or to determine whether or not an area would benefit from the establishment of a breakfast club in the locality. In terms of the success of the breakfast club as a health promotion tool, parents noted that their children were more comfortable with tasting new food at home resulting from breakfast club attendance, for example breakfast cereals and fruit rather than chocolate-based alternatives. Thus the breakfast club is a useful health promotion tool because it encourages children to think about their nutritional choices, which will benefit their health (NCCA, 2009).

However, data from the UK exists, which states that of children who skip breakfast, 33% do not have anything to eat until lunchtime (Hoyland et al., 2012). This means that the brain does not get a chance to replenish energy stores throughout the morning, possibly affecting levels of interest and concentration. Therefore the breakfast club serves as an important PEIP in the sense that it serves to offer support through the provision of breakfast in a safe place (HFfA, 2012; Shemilt et al., 2003), while at the same time addressing the underlying issues of children skipping breakfast and arriving into school hungry (Bartfeld & Ryu, 2011; Street & Kenway, 1999). Attending a breakfast club can also support early

childhood development, improve punctuality and reduce instances of child hunger (Children's Food Trust, 2008; HFfA, n.d), as illustrated by the results of this study.

Practitioners and parents also acknowledged the other benefits associated with breakfast club attendance, such as skills development and encouraging children to eat together. On the other hand, a minority of parents felt that the breakfast club was simply a service is used when they are not free to provide children with their breakfast; they did not seem to be aware of the benefits the service has for children. This intertwines with the challenges faced by the Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs, which included staff being unsure about the level of parental engagement that is suitable to a service like the breakfast club and funding concerns (HFfA, n. d.). This poses the question regarding the contribution breakfast club attendance can make to childhood development.

5.4 Contribution of Breakfast Clubs to Child Development

Overall, breakfast clubs offer support to child development across a range of realms. Parents regarded meal-times as extremely important family time in which young children can learn from their parents and siblings and develop their social, physical and language skills. Interestingly, emotional development received a mixed reaction.

5.4.1 Social development

From the data collected, it is clear that breakfast clubs yield various benefits. Breakfast clubs aim to offer children a safe, welcoming environment in which they can eat their breakfast (HFfA, 2012; Shemilt et al., 2003), and it is apparent that practitioners were doing their best to ensure that this remains true, because the club time was used as a chance for children to talk to practitioners on a personal, individual level. With regards to children's home environments, parents noted that their children sampled new foods more easily at home, which is affiliated with the outcomes of the Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs, which too was successful in encouraging children to become bolder regarding their food

choices (HFfA, n. d.). Furthermore practitioners outlined how breakfast club users had become more independent, because a rule of the breakfast clubs in all settings stated that children must be active in their efforts to prepare the breakfast table or clean up after themselves. Some settings also encouraged a varied age group of children to eat together, which is beneficial for younger children, as developmental psychology literature from Vygotsky – the zone of proximal development - informs us (Keenan & Evans, 2009). It was common in mixed age groups for older children to help the younger ones, according to practitioners.

5.4.2 Fine motor development

The data indicates that children were always encouraged to do things for themselves while eating their breakfast, ranging from pouring their drink to feeding themselves. Not only is this intertwined with encouraging children on the pathway to independence, but this technique is beneficial for children's physical development, particularly in relation to their fine motor skills, which as we know are rapidly developing during the early years (Doherty & Hughes, 2009).

5.4.3 Language development

Practitioners were enthusiastic in their response to the level of support breakfast clubs can offer regarding language development. While numerous theories of language acquisition exist, there is no unanimous agreement on how language is learned (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). However, there is a sense of agreement regarding the role of the adult in children's language acquisition; to act not as instructors *per se* but rather to guide and facilitate opportunities for language expansion (Whitebread, 2012). Thus the breakfast clubs are useful in supporting language development because, practitioners use the breakfast club time to interact with children on a more personal basis. It is important to remember that language acquisition occurs more rapidly when children engage in relevant and meaningful conversations with adults in particular (Whitebread, 2012), in situations such as around the breakfast table.

5.4.4 Emotional development

Some practitioners did not make a connection between emotional development and breakfast club attendance. However, when one considers Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and the various contexts in which a child may find themselves, the ability to control one's emotions proficiently is extremely important for children, especially when they are new to the breakfast club or are making the transition from home to day-care (Whitebread, 2012). Thus breakfast clubs can offer emotional developmental support because the experience of taking part in such a club offers frequent attentiveness to the children as well as promoting self-esteem through giving children the chance to make independent choices, such as setting the table and deciding what to eat. Thus, when one considers Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) and the importance of finding self-actualisation, it is true to say that breakfast clubs offer effective, holistic support to their service users.

5.5 Partnerships with Parents

Developmental psychology literature has informed us of the important influence of the various interactions between the different contexts in which children live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), intertwined with their temperament (Wieczorek-Deering & Halpenny, 2012). With regards to children and ECCE, the relationship between their parents and practitioners must be strong in order to allow children to participate in an enjoyable environment where developmental support is extended beyond the ECCE setting walls.

The findings show that each setting appears to have strong parent-practitioner relationships in place, as illustrated by the following examples. Perhaps most importantly, breakfast clubs in most of the settings were established to provide additional support to parents; one of the breakfast club objectives as the literature states (Shemilt et al., 2003). Additionally, parents were aware of the breakfast club menu and seemed to be satisfied with the nutrient content. Parents were aware that healthy eating policies were in operation in the setting, which further

emphasises the positive, receptive relationship between them and practitioners. However, parents seemed to accept the healthy eating policy without questioning why it was in place – because it is a regulatory requirement (DCYA, 2006).

On a more positive note, parents had viewed a copy of the policy as it existed in the setting *verbatim*. Although it can be difficult to build strong parent-practitioner relationships (MacNeill, 2009), from the parent focus group data it emerged that parents mostly felt they had a solid relationship with the setting, and not simply because their child was a breakfast club member. However, it was noted that food and breakfast consumption proved an excellent conversation started for the new service users. This could prove to be more common in contemporary Ireland since the introduction of the Free Pre-School Year (Corbett, 2012; Moloney, 2014), which has witnessed an increase in demand for ECCE.

Interestingly, although parents felt they had a strong partnership with the practitioners caring for their children, the majority of participants did not think that parental involvement in the breakfast club was an innovative idea. While it is recommended by the breakfast club practice guide (HFfA, 2012) to invite parents to join their children to eat breakfast in the breakfast club, this did not prove feasible with this particular sample. Many parents felt that if an individual had the time to eat breakfast with their children, then it should be done in the home, which agrees with the literature (Children's Food Trust, 2008). Others stated that this simply was not an option because of work commitments

Common barriers to breakfast provision arose from the participating practitioner interviews and parent focus group; lack of time/organisation in the morning, money worries and children simply not feeling hungry during the early morning. With regards to the issue of time and organisation, it is not surprising that this arose as a barrier to parents providing breakfast. Recent statistics show that employment rates in contemporary Ireland are increasing (CSO, 2015), resulting in a higher number of parents working. Interestingly, 1 in 8 parents are lone parents, while 58% of lone parents work (One Family, n.d.). Thus with an increased labour force, mornings can become a stressful part of the day; breakfast

can be simply forgotten about, although evidence suggests that there are plenty of benefits from eating together as a family (Fulkerson et al., 2009). Thus the breakfast club is useful to help parents overcome time constraints, while at the same time they are safe in the knowledge that their child will receive a nutritious breakfast, facilitated by an ECCE setting.

The literature suggests that socio-economic status bears great influence not only on breakfast, but on children's entire diet. Low socio-economic status and a lack of income can result in food poverty (Van Wye et al., 2013; Widome et al., 2009), which can influence children's development and well-being (Friel & Conlon, 2004), due to higher instances of nutrition-related illnesses. In relation to the findings of this study, money worries were cited by both parent and practitioners as a possible barrier for parents when trying to provide breakfast.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has analysed the findings of the data collection using the existing, relevant literature which exists in relation to the research topic. The chapter has found some interesting points, some of which are surprising, and some of which echo the viewpoint of the various existing research. The discussion of the research findings have allowed the researcher to come to various conclusions, all of which will be outlined in the next chapter.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to gauge the level of regard the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has for nutrition, to discover how the breakfast club service provided by settings promotes health by encouraging children to form good nutritional habits. Furthermore the study aimed to uncover how the breakfast club service acts as a support to build and sustain strong parent-practitioner relationships, as well as determining the existential barriers parents feel that is preventing them from providing breakfast daily.

6.2 Conclusions

The research uncovered four main issues in relation to the research area; attitudes to good nutrition and its impact on child well-being, breakfast clubs and health promotion and the role of breakfast clubs in supporting early childhood development and the parent-practitioner relationship. Overall results under each of these headings were positive.

The various stakeholders involved in the research had high opinions regarding the importance of breakfast. The conclusion can be drawn that breakfast consumption is extremely important for young children. The literature regarding the effects of regular, healthy breakfast consumption is complementary to the data collected during this study. In other words, the children responded negatively when asked how they felt if they did not eat breakfast in the morning. Thus it is true to say that healthy breakfast consumption bears great influence on children's well-being. Furthermore the ECCE sector has undertaken steps to improve nutritional provision for young children to empower them to make healthy choices regarding their diet.

The promotion of healthy eating habits in early childhood is extremely important in relation to children's growth and development. From the literature it is clear that the ECCE sector in Ireland is making an effort to promote good health

through the introduction of nutritionally-specific guidelines and recommendations. However, because a national register of breakfast clubs provided by ECCE settings does not exist, it is impossible to determine whether the introduction of nutrition-related literature has been effective in promoting breakfast consumption. Unfortunately as we know almost 13% of children in Ireland do not consume a breakfast during the week (Kelly et al., 2012). Without a register of this kind it is impossible to determine whether there are sufficient breakfast clubs nationally.

However, from this study it is true to say that they are effective in the promotion of healthy eating habits in the early years. The implementation of up-to-date healthy eating policies, eating together as a group and encouraging children to gain autonomy through independently setting the table and cleaning up were common strands which emerged during the study. Literature suggests that meal-times are the perfect time for children to eat a range of healthy foods and develop their social and life-skills (Fulkerson et al., 2009; Utter, Scragg, NíMhurchu & Schaaf, 2007). Furthermore breakfast clubs offer plenty of support to various realms of early childhood development including fine motor skills or language learning.

In relation to the breakfast club supporting parent-practitioner relationships, the study revealed that breakfast clubs were not the specific reason why parents felt they had a strong relationship with the ECCE setting. However, many parents discussed how food and their child's eating habits was a topic of conversation which they found helped to initiate parent-practitioner interaction, particularly when a service user was new. However, interestingly a minority of parents noted that they felt that breakfast clubs should only be used as an option when parents are unable to provide breakfast. Literature explains that breakfast clubs can be criticised, with critics suggesting that they overstep familial boundaries (Children's Food Trust, 2008), and these parents seem to agree. However, the findings of the study draw the conclusion that parents appreciate the support they receive from ECCE practitioners and feel that breakfast clubs are extremely helpful especially in the case of working parents.

Finally, the study illustrates the prevalence of socio-economic and time factors which prevent parents from providing their children with a breakfast. Existing literature states that, in the Irish diet, high levels of fat, salt and sugar present; parents noted how convenience and processed foods are cheapest and therefore this can result in poorer quality diets, especially when money is a worry for a family. Employment levels are rising of late thus time issues, on the other hand, is prevalent in the case of working parents especially which can prevent them from providing breakfast daily. The breakfast club is an excellent alternative which can help to overcome these barriers.

The study has drawn upon these conclusions and the following Breakfast Club Framework has been devised as a result (Figure 5). The Framework offers an explanation of the pre-school breakfast club and its potential outcomes for service users.

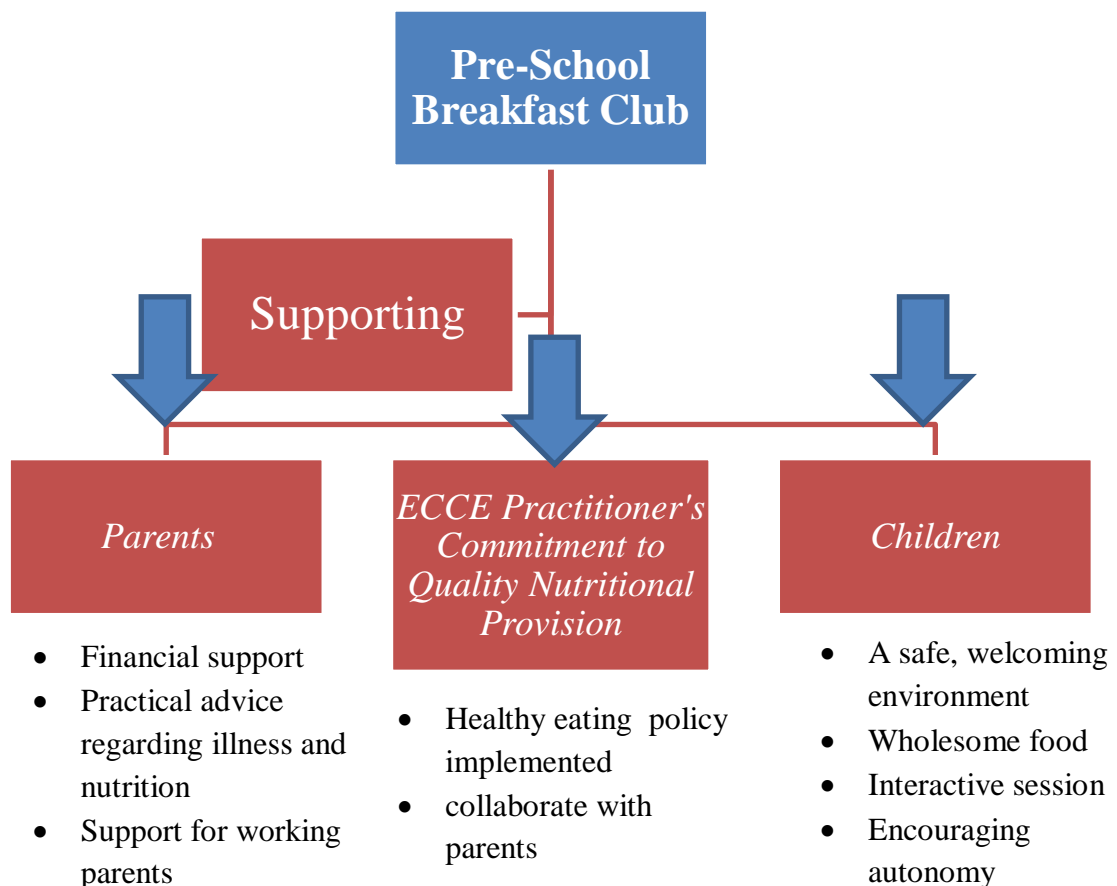


Figure 5: The Pre-School Breakfast Club Framework

6.3 Recommendations

Although the ECCE sector is committed to supporting early childhood development by improving quality practice, it is evident that one support initiative has been overlooked – the breakfast club. Breakfast clubs offer an essence of nutritional provision, family support and developmental support to service users, in a natural, safe environment. As aforementioned the study was limited because only eight settings took part. Further research into the topic on a wider national scale would complement this study and offer more insight in the area for the ECCE field.

However, this study recommends the following points which may be considered for future ECCE nutritional policy;

1. A central database of all ECCE settings which provide breakfast clubs to children should be established and made accessible to parents availing of ECCE. Not only will this promote the importance of breakfast consumption, but service users will be able to discover the location of breakfast clubs in their locality, if any, as well as the benefits yielded by breakfast club attendance
2. Breakfast clubs should reconsider the element of parental volunteering. From the study it was clear that the idea was not popular, even though breakfast club guides and literature exists advocating for as much parental involvement as possible. Parental involvement in breakfast clubs can offer parents further support and nutritional education
3. ECCE Practitioners should disperse more information on healthy eating for young children to parents

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APPENDICES

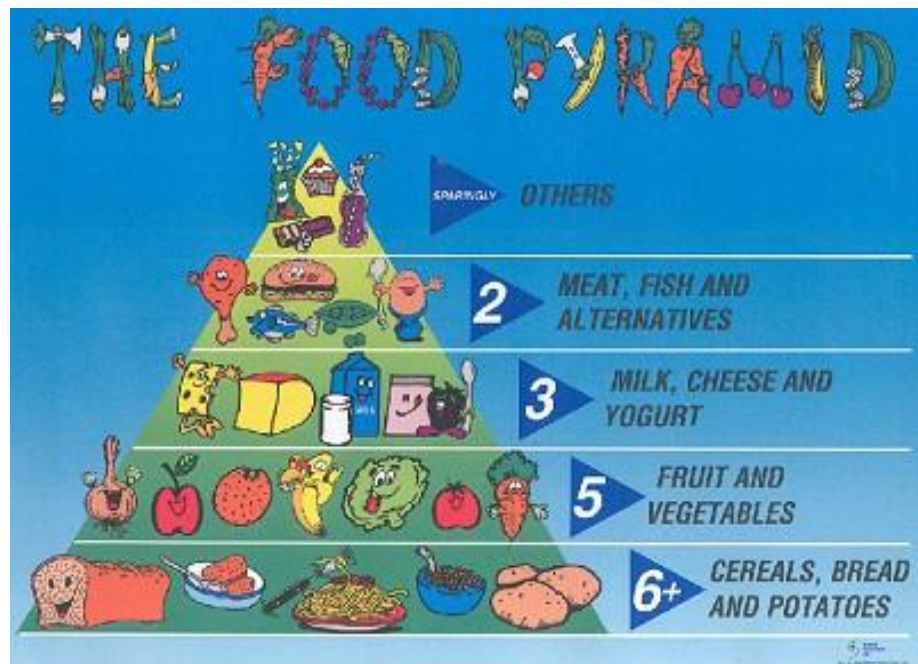
Appendix A The Food Pyramid

Understanding the Food Pyramid



‘Understanding the food pyramid’ (Safe Food, n. d.).

Appendix B Children’s Food Pyramid



‘The food pyramid’ (Food Dudes, 2011).



Appendix C
Gatekeeper Cover Letter

Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Dear _____,

Thank-you for taking my phone call on [Day/Date] last. As we discussed, I am currently doing a Master of Arts in Child, Family and Community Studies in Dublin Institute of Technology. I am carrying out some research, the aim of which is to discover the overall benefits of pre-school breakfast clubs by talking to those involved. Research collection from practitioners will involve an interview, while parents and children will take part in a focus group that is specifically tailored to each group;

Participants	Number of Participants Required	Length of Session
Children (age 3-5)	6-8	15-20 minutes
Practitioners	2	N/A
Parents	6-8	30-40 minutes

Once you are satisfied that you are fully informed about the study and you feel your service would like to take part please contact me and we will arrange a suitable data collection date; my details are listed above. Each participant will receive an information pack, to ensure they are fully aware of my project and why they have been selected to take part. Participation is completely voluntary and confidentiality will upheld throughout the project. I look forward to hearing from you.

Eilis Lothian



Appendix D Practitioner Information Sheet

Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Participant Information Sheet (Practitioner Interview)

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Dear practitioner,

My name is Eilis Lothian and I am completing a Master of Arts in Child, Family and Community Studies in Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of this course I am required to complete a piece of research on a particular topic. The area that I have chosen to study is the breakfast club in pre-schools and crèches. Part of the research collection includes practitioners taking part in an interview about the research area. The topic of the interview will involve the breakfast club in your pre-school/crèche and your experiences of it as a practitioner.

I have selected you as a possible participant because I feel that you will have valuable information to contribute to my research. This participant information sheet should allow you to make an informed decision about taking part in the research. My contact details are provided above; if you have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch. If you agree to take part please sign the enclosed participant consent form which I will get from you on the agreed date of the interview. Also find enclosed a copy of the interview schedule.

The project and the participants' role

The aim of this project is to discover the overall benefits of pre-school/crèche breakfast clubs by talking to those who are directly involved and gathering their ideas, experiences and opinions. Practitioners who take part will be involved in an interview. The interview questions enclosed in this information pack are the ones that will be asked during the interview. Participants will also get the chance to ask

questions about the interview schedule on the day of the interview to ensure complete ease of participation. Should you have any questions in the meantime please feel free to contact me.

Confidentiality and security of information

With your permission I intend to audio record the interview so no information is missed. All of the information gathered will remain confidential. Interviews will be transcribed, and all identifying information removed including names or locations. The findings will be discussed with my supervisor, but private information will not. The results of the study will be included anonymously in the final dissertation.

Statement of participation

Participation is completely voluntary. Participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. Participants may withdraw on the day which was designated for data collection, without any negative outcomes.

Risks or benefits

The potential risks are minimal because the information gathered will remain confidential. The researcher will be the only person with access to the raw information. Each participant will be given a pseudonym during the research collection to ensure confidentiality is maintained. The benefit of participating involves contributing to the field of the Early Years. Once you are satisfied that you are fully informed about the study please contact me and we will arrange a suitable interview date.

Kind regards,

Eilis Lothian



Appendix E
Practitioner Consent Form

Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Consent Form (Practitioner Interview)

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Please tick box

1. I have been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study
2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers to my questions
3. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and I have had enough time to consider this information
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason for withdrawing and without affecting my future relationship with the Institute
5. In signing this consent form I, _____, agree to volunteer to participate in this study being conducted by Eilis Lothian
6. I agree to participate in this study, the results of which are likely to be published
7. I have been informed that all research gathered shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher
8. I grant permission to use a pseudonym or initial of first name
9. I understand that I will participate in an audio recorded Interview with the researcher on the above topic, and that a transcription of the Interview is available to me on request

Participant

Date

Signature



Appendix F Practitioner Interview Schedule

Department of Social
Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Practitioner Interview Schedule

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

1. What is your role in the setting?
2. What curriculum do you use?
3. Why did you initiate the breakfast club?
4. How long has the breakfast club been in operation?
5. In your experience how do children behave in the setting if they come to pre-school without breakfast?
6. What do you think are the barriers for parents preventing them from providing a breakfast each morning for the children?
7. Could you tell me about how the breakfast club is funded?
8. Can you tell me about the different kinds of food that is available from the breakfast club?
9. Are children consulted on what they would like for breakfast? How are they consulted?
10. Do you have any healthy eating policies and procedures in place? Can you describe these policies and procedures and what they involve?
11. Are there any parents involved in your breakfast club? Do you think that parents are more likely to engage with the service/practitioners as a result of their child participating in the breakfast club?
12. Can you describe the morning routine of the breakfast club?
13. Do staff sit and eat with the children?

14. Could you rate the following developmental areas on a scale from 1-5 (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest), in terms how the breakfast club is useful in supporting the growth of each area;

- Social skills 1 2 3 4 5
- Emotional development 1 2 3 4 5
- Fine motor skills 1 2 3 4 5
- Language development 1 2 3 4 5

15. Could you elaborate on your choice of answers for each area in terms of how each area is supported during breakfast club time?

- Social skills
- Emotional development
- Fine motor skills
- Language development

16. Are children encouraged to self-serve? Do you have any methods of encouraging children to be more independent in this regard?

17. Any other comments?



Appendix G Parent Information Sheet

Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Participant Information Sheet (Parent Focus Group)

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Dear parent/guardian,

My name is Eilis Lothian and I am completing a Master of Arts in Child, Family and Community Studies in Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of this course I am required to complete a piece of research on a particular topic. Part of the research involves collecting information and the area that I have chosen to study is the breakfast club in pre-schools/crèches. Therefore I aim to gather information from parents by asking you to take part in a focus group. A focus group is a way of gathering research, involving a group of participants talking about their own experiences of a topic. Focus groups are led by a moderator, who guides the group by asking questions which the group then discusses together. The topic of the focus group will involve the breakfast club in the pre-school and your experiences of it as a parent.

I have selected you as a possible participant because I feel that you will have valuable information to contribute to my research. This participant information sheet should allow you to make an informed decision about taking part in the research. My contact details are provided above; if you have any questions do not hesitate to get in touch. If you agree to take part please sign the enclosed participant consent form and return it to the pre-school/crèche. Also enclosed is a detailed copy of the focus group schedule which outlines exactly what will happen during the group.

The project and the participants' role

The aim of this project is to find out the overall benefits of pre-school/crèche breakfast clubs for children and parents, by talking to those who are involved with it and gathering their ideas, experiences and opinions. Participants who take part will be involved in a focus group no longer than 30-45 minutes. The focus group questions enclosed in this information pack are the ones that will be asked on the day of the focus group. Participants will also get the chance to ask questions about the focus group schedule on the day of the focus group to ensure complete ease of participation. Should you have any questions in the meantime please feel free to contact me.

Confidentiality and security of information

With your permission I intend to audio record the focus group so no information is missed. All of the information gathered will remain confidential. Focus groups will be transcribed, and all identifying information removed, such as names or locations. The findings will be discussed with my supervisor, but private information will not. The results of the study will be included anonymously in the final dissertation.

Statement of participation

Participation is completely voluntary. Participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. Participants may withdraw on the day which was designated for data collection, without any negative outcomes.

Risks or benefits

The potential risks are minimal because the information gathered will remain confidential. The researcher will be the only person with access to the raw information. Each participant will be given a pseudonym during the research collection to ensure confidentiality is maintained. The benefit of participating involves contributing to the field of the Early Years. Once you are satisfied that you are fully informed about the study please contact me and we will arrange a suitable date for the group to take place



Appendix H
Parent Consent Form

Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Consent Form (Parent Focus Group)

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Please tick box

1. I have been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study
2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers to my questions
3. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and I have had enough time to consider this information
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason for withdrawing and without affecting my future relationship with the Institute
5. In signing this consent form I, _____, agree to volunteer to participate in this study being conducted by Eilis Lothian
6. I agree to participate in this study, the results of which are likely to be published
7. I have been informed that all research gathered shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher
8. I grant permission to use a pseudonym or initial of first name
9. I understand that I will participate in an (audio recorded) Focus Group with the researcher on the above topic, and that a transcription of the Focus Group is available to me on request

Participant

Date

Signature



Appendix I

Parent Focus Group Schedule

Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Parent Focus Group

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Introduction

- Researcher welcomes all participants and expresses sincere thanks for their time.
- Researcher introduces themselves and talks briefly about their background and the purpose of this research.
- Ethical issues are explained and all consent forms must be signed and obtained by the researcher before the focus group can begin. Participants are reminded that the focus group will be audio recorded.
- Participants are reminded that they retain the right to leave the study at time during the focus group.
- The group will be 30-45 minutes long..
- Participants are reminded that a transcript of the focus group will be available on request.

Topics for Discussion

- What are your thoughts on breakfast?
- What would you consider as a healthy breakfast for children? How do you think a child who starts pre-school/crèche in the morning without eating breakfast is going to behave – will they be tired/cranky/unable to concentrate etc...?
- Do you think that a breakfast club service such as the one is available here is useful? Can anyone elaborate on this?

- Are you aware of the food that is available in the breakfast club in this setting?
- What are the barriers which prevent children from eating a healthy breakfast, for example a lack of time in the morning, children being unable to eat early in the morning etc...? How do you overcome these barriers?
- Are you aware of any healthy eating programmes or guidelines that aim to promote healthy eating habits specifically for children, such as the School Meals Programme, the Food Dudes, the Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-school Services? Do you think that these programmes have any long-term benefits?
- Do you think that, as a result of your child participating in the breakfast club, that you feel you have built up a relationship with the staff, or did you feel supported already?
- Would you like to receive more information about how children can be encouraged to eat more healthily?
- Are you allowed to volunteer during breakfast club time? If not, should this be an option and could you give me a reason for your answer?
- Do you think that different skills can be developed during meal-times when the whole family sits together? For example young children can learn from others how to use cutlery or they could learn a new word such as 'mashing' etc...?
- Would you be willing to pay a fee towards the funding of the breakfast club?
- Any other thoughts or comments?

Closing the group

- Researcher thanks the group once again.
- Participants are given time to ask the researcher questions. Researcher informs the group that should they have any questions or concerns or want more information on the research topic to contact them by phone or e-mail. Contact details are distributed to the group.

- Participants are reminded that a transcript of the focus group is available should they wish.

Appendix J

Child Focus Group Information Sheet



Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Information Sheet for Parents of Children Participating in Research

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Dear parent/guardian,

My name is Eilis Lothian and I am completing a Master of Arts in Child Family and Community Studies in Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of this course I am required to carry out a piece of research. The topic of the research is about breakfast clubs in pre-schools and crèches. Part of the research collection involves children aged 3-5 years taking part in a focus group. A focus group is a way of gathering research, involving a group of participants talking about their own experiences of a topic. Focus groups are led by a moderator, who guides the group by asking questions which the group then discusses together. The topic of the focus group will involve the breakfast club in the pre-school and the children's experiences of it.

The children's focus groups will be facilitated in a light-hearted and child friendly manner. The focus group will last for around 15-20 minutes and will take place in the pre-school. Staff members will be present at all times during the focus group. The group will be interactive, and **will resemble a relaxed group activity, such as Circle Time, and not a formal group interview.** Each child taking part in the focus group will get to have their say if they wish. The focus group will ask each child, for example, what they love about coming to the breakfast club, what they do during breakfast club time and games such as identifying healthy and

unhealthy foods will be played. From running the focus group I hope to paint a picture of how the children themselves see the breakfast club experience.

Please note that participation of children in the focus group is completely voluntary and your child is free to withdraw/you are free to withdraw your child at any time without reason. With your permission I would like to audio tape the group to ensure that no information is missed. **No photographs will be taken.** Should you feel that you would like your child to participate in my research, please find a consent form and a detailed copy of the child focus group schedule enclosed with this letter. **All of the research gathered will remain in the strictest of confidence;** only I will have access to information and names and locations will not be disclosed. My contact details are listed above. Should you have any further questions or would like more information please feel free to contact me. Once you are satisfied that you are fully aware of this study and what will be asked of your child please sign the consent form and return it to the pre-school/crèche.

Kind regards,

Eilis Lothian

Appendix K

Child Consent Form (For Parents/Guardians)



Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings
Consent Form on Behalf of Children Participating in the Focus Group

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Please tick box

1. I have been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study
2. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers to my questions
3. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and I have had enough time to consider this information
4. I understand that my child is free to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason for withdrawing and without affecting my future relationship with the Institute
5. In signing this consent form I agree to my child participating in this study being conducted by Eilis Lothian
6. I have been informed that all information gathered shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher
7. I grant permission to use a pseudonym to ensure anonymity
8. I understand that my child will participate in an (audio recorded) Focus Group with the researcher on the above topic, and that a transcription of the recordings is available to me on request

Participant
(on behalf of child)

Date

Signature



Appendix L

Interview Schedule (Child Focus Groups)

Department of Social Sciences
Dublin Institute of Technology
Grangegorman, Dublin 7

DATE

Breakfast Clubs in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings

Child Focus Group

Student Name: Eilis Lothian

Email: c10370545@mydit.ie

Mobile: 0860516980

Before the child focus group

- All consent forms **must** be signed and obtained by the researcher beforehand. (Parents/guardians are reminded that a transcript of the focus group will be available on request).

Introduction

- Researcher welcomes all participants and thanks children for taking part.
- Researcher introduces themselves and tells the children why they are participating in this activity. Researcher asks the children their names.
- Children are reminded that they do not have to take part in the activity, and if they want to leave during it they can go and sit beside of the members of staff present.
- ‘Circle Time rules’ – children are reminded that everyone will get to have their say and that no-one should interrupt anyone else.

Discussion

- Researcher asks the group the following questions
 - Does everyone in the group eat breakfast?
 - How do you feel if you don't eat breakfast? Are you cranky/hungry/full of energy?

- What do you all like to eat for breakfast?
- Are all of you here in the group involved in the breakfast club here?
- Does your teacher eat with you when you eat in pre-school?
- What do you eat during the breakfast club here? Is there anything that you really like that you do not get in the breakfast club in school?
- Tell me what you eat at home at the weekend, on Saturday and Sunday.
- Do your mummies or daddies come to the breakfast club too? Would you like them to?
- During breakfast time at home or in pre-school do you all get the chance to talk to your siblings/friends and parents/teachers?
- During the breakfast club does everyone get their own plate/bowl/spoon/cereal from the cupboard?
- Who helps prepare breakfast? Who does the cleaning up?

Group activity

- The group will take part in a game
The game will involve children working together to name a range of different breakfast foods (such as cereal, bread, juices etc...) and deciding which ones are healthy and which are unhealthy. Children will be asked why they made these choices.

Closing the group

- The focus group will finish with a story about breakfast
- Researcher thanks the group once again.

Appendix M
Child Focus Group Activity Tools



Appendix N
Practitioner Interview [Venue 1]
Friday 19th June 2015

1. What is your role in the setting?

V(1)P(1): I am the owner and manager.

2. What curriculum do you use?

V(1)P(1): Well I suppose it's shared Aistear/Síolta and Montessori – I still prefer the equipment in Montessori so we do a bit of that as well.

3. Why did you initiate the breakfast club?

V(1)P(1): Well I suppose...to offer a support to parents really. Take for example, em when new businesses open and a lot of our parents who take up employment there, I would find they approach me to open a bit earlier...I open at the minute for [Local Company] because it opens before anyone else so whenever the needs be. When the parent approaches me, well because I live next door I suppose I will open a few minutes early for anyone. But to answer your question I suppose the breakfast club was initiated to support parents who may have been working early and such and it's just really grown from there!

4. How long has the breakfast club been in operation?

V(1)P(1): It's always been here really...10 years...Like I said I live next door so the idea came about when parents approached me and asked would I ever do breakfast for the children and now the breakfast club has grown into a big part of the crèche and that's something I'm really proud of!

5. In your experience how do children behave in the setting if they come to pre-school without breakfast?

V(1)P(1): I think it affects their emotions definitely...I would see that in the breakfast club if they were feeling down or that we have other children with them and it tends to bring them round as you know yourself getting up early in the morning they can be a bit off-form and that but once they come in and see the other kids and start chatting and that they kind of...they forget themselves.

From working with young children for so long I can tell when they haven't eaten...they're more irritable, they don't want to participate in the activities say like in Montessori...I think breakfast is really important because it actually does set them up for the day but it's only when you see what children are like when they haven't eaten that you realise this.

6. What do you think are the barriers for parents preventing them from providing a breakfast each morning for the children?

V(1)P(1): The number one thing is time constraints...and that actually had a lot to do with why the breakfast club here came about to help out parents who were working very early hours...and then I suppose parents can be cautious about money matters and I think then breakfast can get overlooked when parents are trying their hardest to provide and hot meals might get that priority...especially if money is a worry...so it's great that we can offer breakfast, the club is inclusive of all children whether they are coming in early or just before pre-school or school starts they'll always be offered something suitable.

7. Could you tell me about how the breakfast club is funded?

V(1)P(1): Well there's not...I literally probably fund it myself because I don't actually charge for the hour before school just for the bus run. So a lot of the after-schoolers would use that just because it's available. So I give breakfast and I do the run to school. Em so it's basically the run is all that you pay for, not the breakfast club and the hour that they spend here – just in with the after-school price. And then talking about the younger ones I would cover the cost of food and breakfasts with the crèche fees that are charged.

8. Can you tell me about the different kinds of food that is available from the breakfast club?

V(1)P(1): Em well I don't have sugar cereals so it would be em basically Weetabix, there's porridge and there's Cheerios. I don't carry any other cereal – there's nothing chocolate allowed. We do the bread is wholemeal and toasted in the morning and everything else is homemade. I would encourage the children to help with that in the morning. That's what I do

when I'm in with the breakfast club I always make the brown bread and the scones for the afternoon snack. So they're aware that the food is homemade and that it's made from scratch because I would get them to help in the kitchen.

9. Are children consulted on what they would like for breakfast? How are they consulted?

V(1)P(1): Here we would always try to aim you know for children to try to work things out for themselves so with the breakfast club children would be asked say what kind of bread they would like to try and I can bake it, once it's suitable of course...But generally they would be encouraged to think about their choices and what they would like and the staff would ensure that they are heeded and so this helps to develop self-esteem and confidence in one's own choices when the children see that we are in fact listening to them.

10. Do you have any healthy eating policies and procedures in place? Can you describe these policies and procedures and what they involve?

V(1)P(1): Em we do have – I changed it and I will be changing it again. At the minute I have decided that I will do the cooking. The children are not given menus as such but all the food is placed on the plate and if they don't like something they eat around it. Now we do have a very very minor, maybe 2% of children who are very fussy eaters and get very hysterical about the food but generally all children eat around it and eventually they all eat the new food or the dinner and that's worked very well for us this year there's a massive change in I suppose the food because it's all homemade and I suppose the children would help with chopping it and again if they see the process it's easier. So yeah everything would be done on site which is really important and this is emphasised in the policy. The children will see the vegetables coming in and help with the chopping up of that. So therefore they don't...I find that the eating habits have drastically improved since I have started doing this. It used to be [Practitioner] that used to be doing and there was a lot of 'do you want' and 'no' instead of just putting it on the plate and 'if you don't like it just

eat around it or try one'. And just really they...I suppose it's improved drastically over this year And then I suppose it's not really making a big fuss about it either they just eat it or they don't, which is really really important...if you create something around it then that's what creates the habits really so just it's on the plate and if you don't want it don't eat it and they all eat it – very very few children don't eat the food that's prepared, very few of them and then just literally I would just take them into the kitchen and give them if they're really upset and they don't want it rather than creating an issue at the table. Going back to our policy on food well I pride myself on making sure it's right and that it sets the standard for me and staff to follow through with giving the children only the best foods.

11. Are there any parents involved in your breakfast club? Do you think that parents are more likely to engage with the service/practitioners as a result of their child participating in the breakfast club?

V(1)P(1): Em...again the parents are all so busy that's why they use the breakfast club! We're really lucky here, I mean the girls are great and parents have been coming to us for years, so there is a strong relationship between staff and parents on the whole. So really the most participation I would get...I mean they love the smell of cooking they would get and they know it's all homemade and they can smell the food is made from scratch. It would give them...I suppose it's a better environment and I suppose they're happier leaving their kids. Em other than that, no, I don't have a lot of participation other than to ask for recipes the odd time because I do make a nice brown bread! (Laughs). But no the feedback in general because of this year I would do that and that is why there is leeway for the odd child. But it has to be discussed in great detail and the menu has to be given to the parents so that they're aware of the meals and aware of our policies around it and now we would have to address that with snack for the pre-school. And we would have to reign that in two or three times a year we would have to go back to our policies because the parents do send in things that children would prefer to eat but we try to create a

programme around 'good food' and 'bad food' and where it comes from. Like we would bring in like sheep and we would grow we have strawberries and tomatoes like we would try and show them from scratch so therefore I suppose the fact that the children know that all food doesn't come from a supermarket is good!

12. Can you describe the morning routine of the breakfast club?

V(1)P(1): Em the children generally come in, I open first so we empty the dishwasher, the children, and generally they're all after-schoolers at that time in the morning, they would help to empty the dishwasher and set the table em again because they're after-schoolers the choices are allowed; they pick their chair they get their bowl and spoon, they choose their cereal. If they're able to do the entire thing themselves, or sometimes an older after-schooler will be asked to help the younger ones, because it's just good practice for them to be able to get their own things. And I would be then chatting to them about their night, about what's going on in school, but again they would have the choice and that would be done first. And then anyone that's finished comes into the room and then toast is ready and available for anyone else who doesn't want the cereal. So then depending on the number [Practitioner] comes in then 15 minutes after me. And then once she's here we can start with the baking. So the kids can help with that if they want to and if they don't want to they don't have to but I would do that in the kitchen in the morning.

13. Do staff sit and eat with the children?

V(1)P(1): The staff sit with the children now. That would have been introduced strongly a while back I suppose because children aren't used to everyone sitting at the table and having a conversation and again it's news and letting someone else talk and – social skills and all the social activities around listening, talking so it's a great activity to have. And snack time would be similar, lunch time, dinner time would be similar. Staff are asked to sit down with the children – best practice would be to eat with the children but that doesn't always happen but we do sit with the children and

even have a piece of fruit just to show them that you're sharing a meal with them and that's an experience they should have as well.

14. Could you rate the following developmental areas on a scale from 1-5 (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest), in terms how the breakfast club is useful in supporting the growth of each area;

- **Social skills** V(1)P(1): 5
- **Emotional development** V(1)P(1): 5
- **Fine motor skills** V(1)P(1): 5
- **Language development** V(1)P(1): 5

15. Could you elaborate on your choice of answers for each area in terms of how each area is supported during breakfast club time?

- **Social skills**

V(1)P(1): A huge amount of chatting whether it's about what they're eating and whether it's healthy and just the knowledge that they will receive from other children and what they eat and just the social aspect we've sort of gone away from that – just me being in my parent frame of mind and eating in front of TV's and all the rest of it so no it's a very social very good – it would be one of the biggest. So they breakfast club especially is a good way of strengthening social skills because the morning routine hasn't taken over just yet!

- **Emotional development**

V(1)P(1): Well I suppose for me because a lot of the children are quite sloppy eaters so they haven't been given the chance to be sloppy...because it's not tidy so they don't know how to eat and how to you know use a fork so we you know the younger ones get the spoon and as soon as they're able for a fork they should be given a fork and they should be allowed to make a mess as well which doesn't happen – a lot of places are too clean! So em it doesn't matter there's no cleaning around the children when they're eating so it's just sitting and chatting to them and the room is cleaned when they've finished eating. There's no sprays allowed in the

room when there's food here so therefore the room would be cleaned when the children have left to go outside so then there's a natural routine to our meal times. And emotionally again when they're getting upset and disturbed we...if they push it away we just leave it we don't talk about it you don't discuss it we just sit down as normal and generally the children will eat then because they're hungry. I cut down – the snack in the morning was replaced and the dinner was placed at a later time to allow them to be hungrier. So then that was reviewed again and would be reviewed you know as to what's for snack, is it too carbo rich...we completely stopped using white bread for a while, even though they like it. So then you know again we would have bits of that but mainly wheaten and homemade or scones and homemade you know so our cheese...anything at all to get them into different tastes. So then emotionally I suppose there has been huge issues in the past around it so then it's great just to not have to deal with it since we did our review. We don't make a big fuss. If the child is just too emotional then we just ask them what's wrong or do you want to go out and talk to [Practitioner] but we just remove them and remove the plate and then they can come back to it again. But again to create a big issue is just not the way forward and there's quite a few children that have had issues like that so we just don't do it.

- **Fine motor skills**

V(1)P(1): Well the fine motor skills really is just simple like children still like to eat with their fingers and the hand-eye coordination they...I suppose using their hands. A lot of the children the younger children haven't chosen their hand yet so again this making a mess is an issue so therefore they tend not to learn early but they like I made peas last week and there was peas everywhere! (Laughs) They just didn't like them you could tell they were all on the plate or on the table or the floor so therefore there's great you know there's great managing a spoon from the very very youngest we don't we do not feed we try not to feed any child over the age

of 1 years. Em and there's children who have come in at two not being able to feed themselves but we would literally put the spoon in their hand and we would have a second spoon but they have to try.

- **Language development**

V(1)P(1): There's language development in everything just think you know when you're talking about the new words em I was just saying that to the students there you know when mashing the potatoes or anything – new vocabulary for the children as in everyday and when the staff sit down you don't even realise because you're in childcare how simple everything is and how many words you use that the children don't know and that that just increases vocabulary so for me em the more they know about food where it came from and if it's only a couple of or one new word every time like in particular we have one child and again he eats everything and they're organic and everything is grown at home and chickens lay their eggs and you know they bring them in and we cook with them like there's real...so everybody knows about his house and where the vegetables come from and he talks about it and that's fabulous because he himself is only 5 and he is giving other children language that we're not using either so therefore it's a fantastic time if everyone sits together to talk which is the biggest thing now the social aspect of communicating- that's where the language is introduced.

16. Are children encouraged to self-serve? Do you have any methods of encouraging children to be more independent in this regard?

V(1)P(1): Well we do – children are asked to take their bowls out to me or into the sink, they're not supported I suppose from the very young stage and it doesn't matter if it falls on the floor and makes a mess you see I know here we're quite lucky you know at home they don't have that...so no it would be encouraged to clean like as you know because we're Montessori-based you take equipment out and you put it away so it's the same with that like some children would say that I'm putting my plate into the dishwasher and they can put it in if they're able. The dishwasher is

open and the children can take it to whatever level they want it to and again to communicate that they want water. We don't serve anything only water or milk that's it we don't have juices or anything and all the children in the crèche drink water to a huge amount. But again that's because we cut everything else out and now I don't think there's a child in the crèche that doesn't drink water maybe between 10 or 12 times a day it's introduced and given on the sideboard all the time. So no I mean even they can help like even the helpers for today there's two children who would come in and serve the food to the other children and tomorrow there'll be somebody else em you get the spoons you set the table – the same with snack time the cups, the plates, the chopping of the fruit now not may places don't agree with that but we do – supervised obviously – which again is a good idea. Children can't butter bread; they can't do anything unless they're given the opportunity to try so. It would be encouraged especially in the after-schoolers. But you know the younger ones learn such an awful lot from the older ones so if they see the after-schoolers doing it they want to try oh can I can I try can I it's the same as making the scones can I cut them out so again you allow them that's what we're here for we're not here thank god at home everything has to be neat and tidy we're used to mess so again they get a bit more opportunity and that's what we're here for is more opportunity for them to gain that knowledge from all of us so...

17. Any other comments?

V(1)P(1): Em no not really I mean I think it's a great one but I think that it's you know it is being addressed you know over the years it is becoming address like I used to serve juice and then one parent thought it was too strongly juiced and then you know I would have been really funny about sugar content and when I do all the shopping but over the years I feel that when you make a decision and you know this is our policy and then things just improve and improve like the children in fact nobody doesn't eat the homemade wheat bread. Like at the beginning it was like oh no I don't eat

this and like that if they don't we have I suppose 3 children out of a crèche of 75 that don't eat that don't eat the dinners they're fed and they're 6/7/8 and all the rest of it but we don't create an issue so then it's like oh it's wheaten. But then there's 3 choices for those children so then it's like there's 3 things you can make the choice to choose so they would choose two so no I think it was a great like we need to do it because the children just don't eat with family anymore they don't do everything. It's just like everyone's so busy the kids come home from school and they eat the dinner and do the homework and eat their dinner in front of the TV like my children would do it but I'm like no no it's up to the table like freeze the TV don't even have it on because it's distracting and then you don't communicate you know a lot of it is personal to me because I just think phones have destroyed everything. Like one day my 9 year old we went in the car and I said oh good now we have the whole journey and he says right now Mammy we'll do that communicating thing you're always on about and that just said it all to me I'm afraid! So we do that often now the communicating thing and it's great in here and when we do review our policies and that in staff meetings it's great to see that it's nice and consistent!

Appendix O
Parent Focus Group [Venue 2]
Thursday 2nd July 2015

Researcher: Hello, thanks very much for being here today to take part in this focus group. My name is [Researcher's name], and I'm currently doing a Masters course in Child, Family and Community Studies in Dublin Institute of Technology. And as part of this course I have to complete a dissertation, which involves picking a particular subject that is related to children and childcare, and carrying out some research to find out what real people have to say on the matter! So as you know I picked the subject of breakfast, and breakfast clubs in pre-schools as my area that I wanted to study. So I suppose the purpose of this research is for me to not only find out about the benefits of breakfast and healthy eating for children, but to also discover what people who are involved in pre-school breakfast clubs have to say on the matter! I'm really looking forward to hearing what you think. Just before we start, is everyone happy to take part in the group?

Parents together: Yes/Yes that's no problem.

Researcher: Fantastic thank you all. If any of you would like to leave during the group please feel free to, you don't even have to ask because there is no pressure on any participant to stay. We shouldn't be longer than 35-40 minutes. Are there any questions before we begin?

V(2)Parent(3): I read the information that was given to us by [Practitioner] on your behalf. It was quite clear and I am happy to take part, but I suppose the only question that I have is about what you will do with the information that you collect here today?

Researcher to [Parent 3]: That's good to hear, I tried to make everything on those pages as clear as possible, because the last thing I wanted was for parents to have a mountain of paper to read! When I am finished gathering all my information, from various parent focus groups and so on I will have to condense all of the information together and identify any common themes or strands that emerge as a result. This will make up my own original set of findings which I will then compare to pre-existing published work. The raw data that is collected will be stored in a locked cabinet that only I have the key of, and all names and identities will be removed when I clean up the raw data. Everything will be destroyed once my entire report has been written up. Does that answer your question?

V(2)Parent(3): It does indeed thanks.

Researcher: Could I collect your consent forms before we start please? I'm going to audio record the group, just for myself so I don't miss out on anything. Is that ok with everyone, if anyone would prefer I can take notes instead...Ok thank you I will begin the audio recording now...If any parents would like a typed transcript of the session please let me know when we have finished up. My contact details are listed on the slips of paper that I left on each chair before the session began; phone/text/e-mail, whatever is most convenient. I'm going to kick off by asking all of you your names, and everyone will get a name tag with a number on it – if you see me jotting down a number when you speak it's simply to allow me to differentiate between each speaker when I'm listening back to the audio recording!

Parents say their names

Researcher: Thank you! So, first of all I just want to get a general idea of what everyone's thoughts are on breakfast?

V(2)Parent(1): Well I really think that it's extremely important to help kick-start the day for children especially.

V(2)Parent(2): Oh yes definitely would agree with that! Like I always would say that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. You have more energy, and I think that this helps children to do better in school and in crèche...like when they have had something to eat. I know myself that if I don't get to eat in the morning food is all you think about until you get something to eat. So like I would imagine for children it's even harder to concentrate.

V(2)Parent(4): Breakfast is such a vital thing to include...it kick-starts the metabolism and gets a person fuelled up for the day!

Researcher: I would definitely agree. What would you consider a healthy breakfast for children?

V(2)Parent(2): Yeah like the cereals that aren't so high in sugar...Weetabix and Redybrek...and wholemeal stuff like bread...I would always think of the healthy cereals and breakfast options as the ones that aren't specifically for children, like what [Parent 1] mentioned – Coco Pops, Sugar Puffs and so on...

V(2)Parent(3): Something that is well-balanced...while being appealing to the child because we eat with our eyes. Cereals, fruit, yoghurts, porridge and juices I suppose!

V(2)Parent(1): I think that stuff like wholemeal toast and bagels, wholegrain cereals and porridge and Weetabix are what would make up a healthy breakfast for children. The cereals like Coco Pops and Frosties are so popular – I know my own love them – but hasn't it come out recently that these are full of sugar and so they're not really as good as they seem...which is probably why the kids love them so much! But I know in our house I would always try and keep these kinds

of cereals for treat days like Fridays...the same with fry-ups! They are so nice but something that is dangerous!!

Researcher: How do you think a child who starts pre-school/crèche in the morning without eating breakfast is going to behave – will they be tired/cranky/unable to concentrate etc...?

V(2)Parent(6): Children are usually more active than adults so I think that not eating breakfast can affect their energy levels at break-time...they might feel sleepy or find it hard to concentrate in class which can then even possibly lead to long-term issues such as poor performance at school, weight gain because they may fill up on junk food to get that instant sugar hit...the implications of this could even result in them not wanting to interact with others...the child might not feel in top form but they might not realise that they just need to eat because they haven't any energy or drive to concentrate...

V(2)Parent(2): Oh yeah when children don't eat breakfast they will behave as all of those...like when you think about it they are after going without anything to eat for more than 8 hours, depending on the time they had dinner of course...so if they don't eat breakfast they have had nothing to eat at all for longer than 8 hours so of course they won't be themselves.

V(2)Parent(1): Yes I would say that they would behave in this way too...like I think being unable to concentrate would be a big one. I think that missing breakfast has really major impacts on children that are all really negative.

V(2)Parent(4): Yes and then of course the behaviour isn't exactly going to be well-received by others and he or she might get into trouble which may well kick-start the pattern again.

Researcher: Do you think that a breakfast club service such as the one available here is useful? Can anyone elaborate on this?

V(2)Parent(2): Yes. It is very important and it takes the pressure off of me in the mornings too. Like I can drop the children off to [Crèche Name] and I know that they will get a good healthy breakfast before they start into their busy day. I have children in both school and pre-school so it's great knowing that children of all ages will get their breakfast. The mornings are so busy with getting washed and packing bags that breakfast can sometimes be put to the bottom of the list!

V(2)Parent(1): Definitely. I think that it takes the pressure off of working parents as [Parent 2] has just talked about...also I think that some children are better inclined to eat more in the company of other children so I think that the breakfast club can benefit fussy eaters too.

V(2)Parent(6): Oh yes I think so...like so many parents are leaving early for work and they don't always have the time to prepare or give breakfast in the morning.

Researcher: And are you aware of the food that is available in the breakfast club in this setting?

Parents together: Yes.

V(2)Parent(7): There is a lot of emphasis on healthy foods and pushing Weetabix and Cornflakes rather than the chocolatey ones over the last couple of years.

Researcher: What are the barriers which prevent children from eating a healthy breakfast, for example a lack of time in the morning, children being unable to eat early in the morning etc...? How do you overcome these barriers?

V(2)Parent(5): Time! Lack of time... lack of time, like there's a lot in my family so sometimes trying to get everyone up and dressed and washed can be hard enough so then of course the breakfast can be just totally forgotten about. But of course this isn't something we try to have happen on a regular basis...but that's just real life.

V(2)Parent(7): In my experience distractions like televisions and gadgets can and they do become a barrier for them...which take up time and time is really precious in the morning *anyway!* So in my house we have put a stop to using gadgets in the morning, so we may see an improvement!

V(2)Parent(1):Hmmm...well I can think of 3 straight away. A lack of time in a busy house is always something which I think stops children from eating a healthy breakfast. Like you would need to get up at 6 in the morning if you were to try and get yourself together, get the children ready, pack bags, pack lunches....so this isn't really the best option I don't think because you'd be wrecked by lunchtime! Also the lack of appetite is something which I think stops a lot of children from eating breakfast. Like I know my own take a bit of time to wake up properly in the morning so eating a full breakfast isn't very appealing to them! And this, which I think rings true with a lot of parents, can result in fallings out and arguments about eating. I really don't like when this happens because I feel that this is how a problem relating to food and eating can grow...if it's made into a big deal that ends in tears. The third problem I think is money. I would always think that the 'convenience' foods are cheaper than the foods which are better for you. Like the other day actually I was doing my shop and I happened to spot that 2-ltr bottles of Coke were on offer for €1.50 while the same size bottles of water were a euro dearer. It does be the same with the cereals...Coco Pops half price, Frosties buy one get one free. Which doesn't sound like a big deal but when you have mouths to feed it can sometimes be easier to go with the cheaper foods. And of course children are more likely to eat a bowl of Frosties say than a bowl of Cornflakes...I suppose the way to [reading question] overcome these barriers would be to make sure that you are organised. Planning is key to ensuring families are organised for the next morning. Also, I think that if you don't have the

unhealthy stuff in the house in the first place the kids aren't going to want to eat them...so providing a healthy breakfast option may encourage children to eat healthier...as well I find that if children know there is stuff for breakfast in the house for the next morning they are more likely to eat it.

V(2)Parent(2): I think that the barriers would be definitely a lack of time in the mornings and trying to get everyone ready. Also, another one has to do with not being able to get to the shop on time in the evenings or forgetting to get the cereal or the milk while doing the big shop. So to try and overcome this problem I would always make a list when I'm doing the big shop and then would try and check the fridge every day to see if I need to get anything like bread or milk. But sometimes life can get in the way! Like my kids would do stuff in the evenings during the week, including football and athletics training so to be honest getting to the shop for breakfast the next morning isn't always top of our priority! And then of course in the evening you are trying to make dinner for the family too. So the breakfast club is a great service to have.

Researcher: That's so true...like even myself I am so bad at getting up in the mornings so I definitely think it's important to be organised! Are you aware of any healthy eating programmes or guidelines that aim to promote healthy eating habits specifically for children, such as the School Meals Programme, the Food Dudes, the Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-school Services? Do you think that these programmes have any long-term benefits?

V(2)Parent(2): Yes. I think that the long term benefits are that my child eats such a varied diet because of the Meal Plan in his pre-school. It's so reassuring to know that my child won't be getting junk every day of the week...and then of course treats and treat meals are kept as something that is special and just for treat days, which is Friday with us! But I suppose again like long-term I find that if my child eats a range of stuff this just becomes the normal and then they aren't afraid to try new things. So the Meal Plan is great in that way. Also I can see what my children get in the crèche to eat so it's all very open and straight-forward.

V(2)Parent(1): As far as I know the crèche runs a healthy eating rule...I think they call it a healthy policy? I was given a copy when my child started, as I'm sure [Parent 2] was. So it is very nice to know that the crèche has this in place and that parents are given a copy when their child first starts! I suppose then in the long-run if children are having a good diet it'll affect their energy levels and their temperament and their interest in doing things so I say when it's full of healthy stuff the longer it keeps up the better.

V(2)Parent(3): I would know about the Food Dudes from my own being in primary school, they're actually finished with the Food Dudes in their school...but I really thought the Food Dudes was a great one...I'm not sure how familiar you are with the Food Dudes but I found that they were way more interested in trying the fruit and veg because it was the done thing in school because the Food Dudes was happening...the pre-school one, I didn't know that one existed! I'd like to know more about that one because well like especially

with my own being in pre-school and getting their food and meals in pre-school too.

Researcher: Do you think that, as a result of your child participating in the breakfast club, that you feel you have built up a relationship with the staff, or did you feel supported already?

V(2)Parent(2): Yes I definitely would feel supported by the staff. The staff always have a brilliant greeting for me and the kids in the morning, which is a great start to the day! It's nice to see a friendly face in the mornings...I would always have felt supported by the staff here, even when my child didn't have their breakfast in the crèche.

Parents nod in agreement

Researcher: Would you like to receive more information about how children can be encouraged to eat more healthily?

V(2)Parent(5): Yes please! It's just good to get into the habit of knowing how to get them to eat well without a scene happening!

V(2)Parent(4): I feel that I am up to speed with what I need to know, but I would always be happy to get more information!

Researcher: And are you allowed to volunteer during breakfast club time? If not, should this be an option and could you give me a reason for your answer?

V(2)Parent(1): No I don't think that parents should be allowed to volunteer. My child would not benefit from my presence in the room...she's quite independent and I really try to encourage this.

V(2)Parent(3): That's never really come up in conversation before...

V(2)Parent(2): No...I don't have the time on weekdays because I have to work full-time. So this has never really been an issue with me...something that I have never really thought about to be honest!

Researcher: Do you think that different skills can be developed during meal-times when the whole family sits together? For example young children can learn from others how to use cutlery or they could learn a new word such as 'mashing' etc...?

V(2)Parent(3): Oh I would anyway...family time is so so important, and during meal-times young children can learn so much, different social skills such as learning how to interact with others, manners at the table, and even learning how to follow rules, such as no gadgets or phones at the dinner table, they get a chance to practice their little finger and hand movements, the really simple stuff like

balancing their breakfast on the spoon and then transporting – for want of a better word – the breakfast from the bowl to their mouths...even they can learn language like new words and their meaning, like the word ‘mashing’ in your question...

V(2)Parent(6): I would always make sure that my family eat together at every possible opportunity, especially on the weekends

V(2)Parent(1): Oh yes I definitely have to agree with you there! Especially in busy house...meal times such as breakfast time are a great opportunity for social interaction to happen. In my house I would always try and encourage the whole family to sit together around the table when we all eat...the TV gets switched off and as a rule there are no mobiles or papers brought out...it’s a great way for us all to catch up as well I think, especially when we have all been out working or in school or crèche. I would often find that younger children mimic older siblings and their parents and this is how they learn new skills.

V(2)Parent(2): Oh yes meal times are very important for family. I would always think of meals as ‘family-time’...we actually have similar rules as [Parent 1]!! For us meals are a time where everybody can sit down talk about their day which develops different skills like social skills and interaction skills.

Researcher: Would you be willing to pay a fee towards the funding of the breakfast club?

V(2)Parent(2): Well as far as I know the service fees we all pay will go towards the whole entire food budget, obviously I wouldn’t know the ins and outs of the money side of things but I am sure that what we pay covers all food including breakfasts.

Parents nod in agreement

V(2)Parent(1): I do already.

V(2)Parent(4): I think that if we were asked to contribute a little bit towards the breakfast club on its own I would be happy to give a few euro...but this is just me but I would then have to see some evidence that the donation was used as it was intended to be! But overall because I think the breakfast club is so useful that I wouldn’t mind contributing.

Researcher: Any other thoughts or comments?

V(2)Parent(2): Well I think that the breakfast club is something that seems to be under-rated in pre-schools and crèches. It means that the pressure is taking off parents who are working and therefore just don’t have the time on the weekdays to feed their children before going to work and school and then so simply just using the service will is quite a lovely thought when you are worried that your child won’t have a good day.

Researcher: Ok well we have come to the end of the session! Thank you all very very much I felt that we had a great discussion around all of my different points of discussion and what you were all saying was really interesting. I really enjoyed your experiences and I am delighted with how the group went tonight. It was pretty much plain sailing! I can't wait to go home and put all of my different research together to get the bigger picture! It's so great to hear from people who are experiencing and using the breakfast club service, like a book written by a 'professional' just isn't the same!! Again I would like to remind you all that should you want a typed copy of this focus group don't hesitate to contact me and we can discuss it then too. If anyone would like to speak to me today please come to me when the session has ended. It was lovely to meet you all today!

Appendix P
Child Focus Group [Venue 6]
Tuesday 21st July 2015

Researcher: Hi everybody! Thanks for coming over to talk to me! So, like [Practitioner] said, my name is [Researcher's name], and I'm doing my homework for my school so that's why I'm here in your pre-school today! So I want you guys to tell me all about breakfast. So what we're going to do is answer a few questions, I want to see what you all think about it, and then we're going to do a little activity to do with food, and food that you should eat for breakfast. Let me show you all my big bag of shopping! [Shows children the bag].

V(6)Child(2): Are we going doing all of that shopping?

Researcher: Yes we sure are! We're doing all of that...will you be able to do you think?

Children together: Yeah!

V(6)Child(2): There's lots and lots to do!

Researcher: There is lots and lots to do alright! I'll show you all as we go along. And then we're going to read this story. So first of all we'll start off with everyone's names, because you all know my name...We'll start off here...

(Children say their names. Each child is given a name-tag with a number on it to allow the Researcher to note on the audio recording the point at which each child speaks)

Researcher: Great! So boys and girls does everyone here at the table want to talk about breakfast and take a look at all of my shopping? You don't have to if you don't want to!

(Children agree that they all want to take part)

Researcher: Thank you all very much! So when we are answering our questions, we will all answer one at a time, so we can all hear each of our friends! Ok everyone?

Children together: Ok!

Researcher: Great! Ok so now we'll do the questions. So does everyone eat breakfast in the morning?

Children together: Yes!

Researcher: And how would you feel if you don't have breakfast?

V(6)Child(3): Sick!

V(6)Child(1): And dya know I already have a cough and my Mommy says that if you don't have your cereal that's how you get a cough!

Researcher to [Child 1]: You have a cough? Well your Mommy is right!

V(6)Child(4): Do you know I don't really have breakfast at home I have breakfast here

V(6)Child(1): I have breakfast at home.

V(6)Child(2): My breakfast's at home!

Researcher to [Child 2]: Oh I see you have your breakfast at home. And guys would any of you ever feel kinda tired or hungry if you don't get to eat breakfast?

V(6)Child(1): Yeah I would feel really tired and I wouldn't be able to do my work!

V(6)Child(4): Ya I would feel tired if I don't eat my breakfast on time.

Researcher: And what do you all like to have for your breakfast?

V(6)Child(3): Cornflakes!

V(6)Child(4): Um I have Weetabix.

Researcher: Oh lovely! You like Weetabix? I love Weetabix too they are yummy! And what about you [Child 2]?

V(6)Child(2): Eeem I dunno!

V(6)Child(3/4): I like toast/I like toast!

Researcher to [Child 2]: You dunno? That's ok. Do you like toast?

V(6)Child(2): No.

Researcher to [Child 2]: Would you have Coco Pops?

V(6)Child(2): Emm...I don't have them anymore!

Researcher to [Child 2]: You don't have them anymore?

V(6)Child(2): Well ya I don't have them anymore cus Mammy said they're too bad for my teeth!

Researcher: I see! And...let me think does everyone have breakfast in school here? I know [Child 1/2] said they only have it sometimes...but what about everybody else?

V(6)Child(1/2): We have ours at home!

V(6)Child(4): Yes most of the time I have breakfast in crèche...

V(6)Child(1): It's called pre-school! You know sometimes we have breakfast downstairs like right under our floor! [Stamps on floor].

V(6)Child(4): Ya it's where the 1-2's and 2-3's go to preschool!

Researcher to [Child 4]: Oh wow and would you guys ever have breakfast down with the 1-2's and 2-3's?

V(6)Child(4): Up here!

Researcher to [Child 4]: Oh up here!

V(6)Child(4): Oh actually down there!

Researcher: Oh I see! Does it depend on the days...is it different each day?

V(6)Child(3): Ya if our teacher isn't in we go downstairs.

V(6)Child(2): Yeah and we had dinner at this table today!

Researcher to [Child 2]: Brilliant!

Researcher: And what would everyone get to eat for breakfast when they have their breakfast here in preschool?

V(6)Child(4): Anything!

Researcher: Oh wow anything? Would you get cereal?

V(6)Child(3): Yea

V(6)Child(4): Yea we get Weetabix, we get Corn Flakes, we get Shreddies!

V(6)Child(1): Everything except Coco Pops!

Researcher to [Child 1]: Oh everything except Coco Pops. I see! And what would you all eat on the weekend for breakfast?

V(6)Child(1): We get to have bacon pancakes every Sunday! I love it and it's yummy.

V(6)Child(4): I eat at home.

Researcher: Very good! And would any of you get anything like a fry or something that you are not allowed have during the week?

V(6)Child(1): I like Mammy's special cornflakes and I'm only allowed have them at the weekend.

Researcher: Oh Mammy has special cornflakes and you get to eat them!

V(6)Child(1): Only at the weekend! I have them with milk

Researcher to [Child 1]: Oh you're a lucky ducky!

V(6)Child(3): And I have toast after breakfast!

Researcher: You have toast after breakfast! That's great [Child 3]. I love toast! And if you were on your holidays what would you have for breakfast?

Children together: Emmmmmm.....

V(6)Child(4): Any stuff!

V(6)Child(2): Yeah! And I get to have Coco Pops cus it's holidays so Daddy and Mammy said I'm allowed them.

Researcher: Oh well that sounds so yummy!

V(6)Child(4): Well except Coco Pops for me cus I don't have them for my breakfast. Not chocolate for breakfast.

Researcher: Oh ok I see...not chocolate for breakfast! And can anyone tell me, would your mummies or daddies ever come into preschool and have breakfast here with you?

Children together: NO!

Researcher: Ok. And would you like them to?

Children together: No!

Researcher: Would it be a little bit strange?

Children together: Yeah it would be a little bit strange.

V(6)Child(3): Very weird.

V(6)Child(4): Yeah very weird.

Researcher: And what about your teachers here in pre-school do you eat with them?

Children together: No!

Researcher: But do they sit down with you when you are eating breakfast?

Children together: No!

V(6)Child(2): They sit down at the desk [which is beside the table in this particular room]

V(6)Child(3): But only sometimes the teacher will sit beside us if we are telling her our news!

Researcher to [Child 3]: When you are eating your breakfast in preschool?

V(6)Child(3): Yes! [nods and giggles]

V(6)Child(2): And sometimes we get to eat outside but then we get to play outside too and then we can be outside all day!

Researcher: Oh really? And...do you all think that when you're having breakfast is it a really good time for everyone to talk?

Children together: Yeah!

V(6)Child(4): Everyone bes quiet.

Researcher: Yeah I think so too. Everyone is nice and relaxed and it's quiet when everyone is eating so everyone's calm. I know in my house my Mammy says that there is no TV allowed at the table...

V(6)Child(1): Yeah we're not allowed to watch telly!

Researcher: Yeah we're not allowed to watch telly while we are eating and I'm not allowed to play on my phone and while we are eating breakfast we all have to talk to each other. Do you think they are good rules?

Children together: Yeah!

Researcher: Great guys! Now I only have two more questions left, and then we will do our game and then I'll read you the story! Is that ok with everybody?

Children together: Yes

Researcher: And ok, when everybody is having their breakfast here does everyone have to get their own bowl and their own spoon, or does your teacher do it?

V(6)Child(1): The teacher!

V(6)Child(3): The teachers from downstairs do it!

V(6)Child(2): And dya know my Mummy and my Daddy has dinner after work!

V(6)Child(4): And the teachers bring it out to us!

Researcher to [Child 4]: The teachers bring it out to ye! I see!

V(6)Child(4): Yeah and they put it on the table.

V(6)Child(2): And guess what? Me and my Mammy and my Daddy have breakfast together! On Saturdays and Sundays.

Researcher: Oh well that's lovely to hear! And guys, when you are all finished breakfast do you all have to clean up by yourselves?

V(6)Child(3): No. The teacher does it for us.

V(6)Child(4): Well no we have to put it out in the sink when we are finished with it cus that's the rules.

Researcher: Oh I see! Sometimes I have to do that as well, or else sometimes at home I'll put stuff in the dishwasher!

V(6)Child(3): Ya sometimes at home I put stuff in the dishwasher and in preschool.

V(6)Child(1): Ya so do I!

V(6)Child(4): And so do I as well!

Researcher: Excellent! Ok so we are all finished with the questions, boys and girls I got great answers and I am so happy; this is going to be such a great help with my homework! And now we are going to do this game to do with my shopping! So...can everybody tell me what the word 'healthy' means?

V(6)Child(4): That it's good for ya!

Researcher: Good for you, excellent, so it's in green and we'll put it on the green side. And what about 'unhealthy' food....? That means food that is bad for you! Ok, so we'll put it here! So I have my big bag of shopping here, can everybody tell me what these are?

Children (together): There's eggs in here/Eggs/Water And water's good for your teeth/Apple juice/pizza/Cheerios Hey that's what I have for breakfast!/Sweets/Apple/Banana I like that one!/Chocolate Buttons/Ice Cream/Tic Tacs/Orange I like that one too – me too/Grapes!

Researcher: Well done everyone! So, do you see all of this food here, we're going to decide does it go on the 'healthy' food side or the 'unhealthy' food side. So can everyone remember what 'healthy' food means?

Children together: Yes/healthy means good!/And do ya know my Mommy tolds me all about good and bad food so that's how I know!

Researcher: And what about 'unhealthy'?

V(6)Child(1): I know its bad cus we did it in pre-school!

Researcher: Exactly, let's say if we had too many sweeties, what would happen to us?

V(6)Child(4): Eh well our teeth would all get turned black and every colour!

Researcher: They would, because they contain sugar...and too much sugar is bad for our teeth! So let's start with this...where does this go?

(Children play the matching game, placing-)

Comments made by children are placed in square brackets

- Apple in the healthy zone [I like that one/that one's yummy]
- Chocolate Buttons in the unhealthy zone [**Researcher: If we were having them for breakfast would they be 'healthy' - No way!**]
- Eggs in the healthy zone [They are good!]
- Water in the healthy zone [Cus water is good for your teeth]
- Apple juice in the healthy zone
- Pizza in healthy zone firstly and then upon reflection group changed it to unhealthy [Pizza is good and yummy but not for breakfast!]
- Cheerios in the healthy zone [good!]
- Sweets/Jellies in the unhealthy zone
- Banana in the healthy zone [I like them!]
- Ice cream in the unhealthy zone [Bad side]

- Tic Tacs in the unhealthy zone [I like them but not as breakfast/I'm only allowed them sometimes!]
- Orange in the healthy zone [Good!]
- Grapes in the healthy zone

Children together: WE did it!

Researcher: Well wowee let me see this is great work! Well done everyone my shopping is all sorted out, so now I know exactly what I should eat for breakfast every day! And I'm glad that everyone got a turn and we talked about why each bit of shopping was put either in the 'healthy' side or the 'unhealthy' side! So, it's time for us to read the story now. So will you help me clean up my shopping and then we'll read this story so and see what it's all about...So this one is called 'Eat Your Greens Goldilocks'! and it was written by Steve Smallman

(Asks children can they see the book....Reads story...)

Researcher: Ok everyone so that's the end of the story, and that's the end of our group here today! I just want to say a big big thank you to everybody that was great help for my homework!

Children together: Bye!