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## Working with Families: Theory and Practice Hand-in-Hand

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# students learning with communities

## Working with Families: Theory and Practice Hand-in-Hand



### 1. Background to Project

The project involved 41 final year students of the DIT BA Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme, with their lecturer Anne Fitzpatrick, working with Home Visitors from the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) and their co-ordinator Beth Fagan so that both groups would enhance their knowledge and expertise in working with the families of young children in a home-based programme.

This was an interdisciplinary project, as the ECE students and PCHP staff worked with a student of the MA in Professional Design Practice, Geraldine O'Sullivan, to redesign and enhance support materials for the PCHP.

### 2. What is the Parent Child Home Project?

The Parent Child Home Programme, which is delivered by community parents, is an innovative, home-based literacy and parenting programme which harnesses the expertise and strengths of the people who live and work in the Docklands community ([www.ncirl.ie/ELI/Programmes](http://www.ncirl.ie/ELI/Programmes)). The PCHP is one of the programmes of the Early Learning Initiative based in the National College of Ireland. The Home Visitors make twice weekly visits to families with children (0-6 years) to encourage a love of learning and to support the parent as the child's first and best teacher.

### 3. Aims of the project

Innovative learning opportunities for both DIT students and Home Visitors. The community of Home Visitors became part of the teaching process for the DIT students. The Home Visitors benefited from the learning of students who were engaged in a Level 8 module entitled "Working with Families" but who had limited experience of working with families.

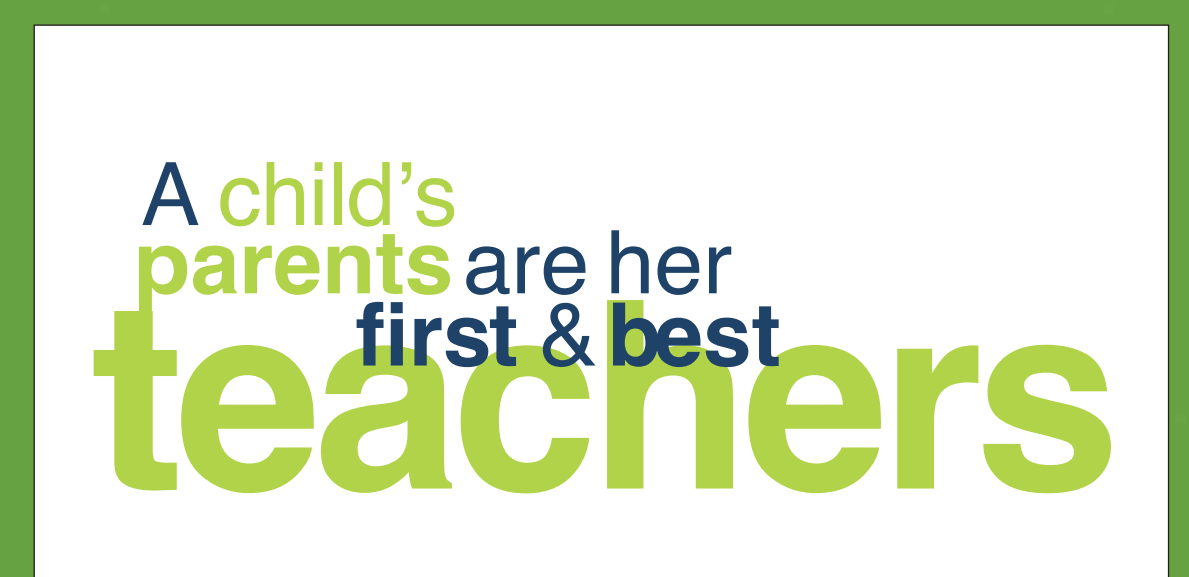
Preparation of DIT students for the real world of work in the Irish early education sector.

Enhanced learning resources both in content and design for use by the Home Visitors.

### 4. Description of Project

The aim of the project was to review and revise the Guide Sheets which the Home Visitors use to promote early literacy with parents of young children in the Docklands area.

The ECE students made 3 visits to NCI and the final meeting took place in DIT. Over the four sessions the students and Home Visitors brainstormed, discussed, argued and finally agreed a new more user-friendly and attractive format for the Guide sheets. The revised Guide Sheets and a new 48-page booklet for prospective parents of the PCHP project were on view in draft format at the final meeting.







# students learning with communities



## Working with Families: Theory and Practice Hand-in-Hand

**Oops, Sorry**  
by Richard Morgan

**Numbers**  
Count the flowers

**What is happening?**  
What do you think we might see on the next page?

**Colours we see**  
[Color bars]

**Textures**  
Smooth

**Emotions**  
Happy, Sad, Excited, Sorry, Pleased, Thankful

**Shapes: BIG & SMALL**  
[Shapes]

**Positional Words**  
In Out Down Over Up Below

11

**Dear Zoo**  
by Rod Campbell

**Numbers**  
Count the animals, count arms, legs etc

**What is happening?**  
What do you think we might see on the next page?

**Colours we see**  
[Color bars]

**Textures**  
Smooth

**Emotions**  
Scary, grumpy, naughty, jumpy.

**Shapes: BIG & SMALL**  
[Shapes]

**Positional Words**  
Here In Over There Out Below

13

**Equal education**  
because every child matters

Involvement of parents in children's learning in the home and in childcare and school settings greatly improves a child's progress.

Parents who have developed the skill and competence to help their children as learners at an early age will be motivated and encouraged to do so throughout the child's school going years.

Specific reading and mathematical intervention programmes are a critical requirement to improve the educational attainment in marginalised communities. A range of learning support systems delivered at the same time in a community can create an excitement and belief in education and improve educational attainment.

### 5. Comments from Students

"The home visitors have lots of experience but less training whereas we have lots of training but little experience, particularly in going into children's homes. So we have a lot to contribute to each other."

"This project really highlighted the importance of the home learning environment in children's learning and development to me. I was unaware of the sheer positive impact parents reading with children at home can have on their development. I think this project is a very safe way for parents to be supported in providing quality home learning experiences."

"I think what I enjoyed most about this project was getting out of my comfort zone. We often do group work in college but it is with very likeminded people who are coming from the same educational background in early childhood education. It was challenging to work with people who are coming from a different place and bringing another perspective to the table."

"The project has inspired to ensure that in my future I connect with the community I am working in and try and make a difference in a unique way similar to the ELI."

"I was shocked as to how much the Home Visitor was able to get out of each picture and it was a key reflection point for me after my three years in college. The amount of times I had read stories to children and thought I had to focus on the words to make it successful yet this book that she was reading could have hundreds of different stories."

"Although I still believe that qualifications are extremely valuable, experience can sometimes lead to learning that cannot take place from any theory or book."

**learning through play**

