

Research aim: To explore the 'wicked problem' (Rittel & Webber, 1973) of the pressures associated with high-stakes testing & assessment that impact on notions of 'quality' Early Childhood Education (ECE).



Relationship to previous research works:

This was the fourth in a series of papers by the ECSDN Sustainability Group exploring the detrimental effect that high returns have on ECE as reinforced by Moss (2019) alongside the challenge set by Wyness (2000) to consider if childhood is in crisis.

Paradigm and Ethics:

Relational ethical considerations for the use of secondary data included a range of sources and awareness of author bias in line with HEI's, BERA (2024) and EECERA (2014) guidelines.

Are we setting children up to fail in the 21st century? The need to reflect for a more sustainable approach

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Author
biographies

References

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework: To Explore the Wicked Problem?!

Praxeology (Pascal & Bertram, 2018) is drawn on to provoke the need for educator & stakeholder reflexivity and appreciation of the interconnected nature of sustainability, quality and the 3 pillars (UN, 2015) in line with the UNCRC (1990) and SDG4 (UN 2015).

This involved educators & stakeholders being aware of power influences (politics, social-cultural, environmental) alongside an awareness of what is morally and ethically right, which can ultimately have a transformative impact on valuing sustainable and quality practice.

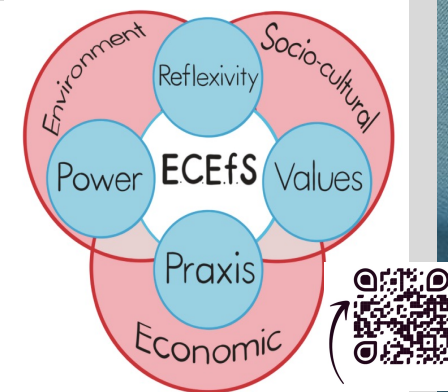
Research Methods:

Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) (Depraetere et al 2021) was used which is increasingly recognised for awareness of personal bias and reviewing quantitative and qualitative research, to critically develop new theory. In doing so, our research incorporated a relational approach that incorporated awareness of personal bias, by engaging reflexively and careful internal listening, for transformation of greater equity and social justice. An ethical approach was embedded so we were all listened to, heard and respected at every stage.

Discussion: Understanding children and their rights can be energising, which in turn invigorates pedagogy and co-constructed environments that are needed to promote quality ECE for sustainability (ECEfS). This allows for a more inclusive pedagogy promoting a sense of agency, respect, and responsibility relevant for the 21st century.

Findings & Implications for Practice & Policy:

The need for personal questioning & reflexivity around inherited practices & appreciate the multi-dimensional infrastructures influencing *notions of quality* ECE. Our findings informed the creation of a theoretical model to demonstrate the interconnected nature of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS) (namely, the political-economic, environmental and socio-cultural pillars / influences).



Theoretical Model: The interconnectivity of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECEfS)