

Athlone Institute of Technology

“Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, and snow is exhilarating: there is no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather.”

(John Ruskin, 1819-1900)

The benefits of an outdoor preschool experience for children in their early year’s education.

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation and the research involved in it are entirely the work of the author. This work, or part of it, has not been submitted for a qualification to any other institute or university.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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Abstract

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the benefits, if any, an outdoor preschool has for children in their early year's education.

This was done by exploring practitioner's views on the value of outdoor settings for children's health and development, before investigating, practitioner's perceptions of how outdoor preschools relate to Aistear. Additionally parental views as to why they choose to send their children to an outdoor setting were explored. Finally, the study investigated the perceptions of both parents and practitioners as to their views on outdoor preschools and risky play.

The information was ascertained by using a qualitative positivist research method in the form of semi structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with four early year's practitioners all of whom had varying levels of experience working within both regular and outdoor settings. Four parents were also interviewed all of whom had children who attended outdoor preschools.

The findings of this study show that outdoor settings can have positive effects on children's health and development. These benefits also emerged as main reasons why parents choose to send their children to these types of settings. There was lack of knowledge and clear definitions regarding risky play and outdoor settings for both parents and practitioners. With Aistear's lack of a definition emerging as a case for concern among practitioners. However practitioners had clear understandings and views as to the links between Aistear's four themes and activities within outdoor preschools.

The need for further research into the value of outdoor preschools within Ireland was recognised in parents and practitioners concerns at a lack of information on this topic. The need for future research into the area of risky play within the outdoors and Aistear as well as outdoor settings and gender specific play emerged as surprising bases for future research.

Introduction

The original outdoor preschool model of early year's education originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s, before spreading across the Europe (Knight, 2009). At present Germany is considered at the forefront of this model of education, having the most established formal forest kindergarten or "Waldkindergarten" program in the world, at present there are 700 forest preschools in Germany (Kane & Kane, 2011). With a rising level of interest in method of educating children as indicated by the long waiting lists for nearly every school (Kane & Kane, 2011). Within the United Kingdom, outdoor preschools began in the 1990's and have grown in popularity ever since. This could be down to the fact that the Forestry Commission got on board and took notice of this concept and provided funding to develop this area of early years education. Although this funding ceased in 2011 it didn't stop the establishment of the Forest School Association in 2012 which is working towards formalising the sector (Wellings, 2012).

It wasn't until 2008 that the first preschool of its kind opened in Ireland, however there has been a growing interest in this method of education on our shores with more and more, early year's education providers taking notice of this model of education this is highlighted by Earth Force Education (2011) who offer forest school training courses within the United Kingdom. They felt the demand to offer similar courses within Ireland in 2013 and based on the success of this course, similar courses were made available in 2014/2015. The concept behind outdoor/ forest preschools is that, children are learning outside in the outdoors environments, ever changing classroom and being actively involved in their own learning. Unlike regular preschools children in forest/outdoor preschools spend 85-95% of their day outside regardless of the weather.

The aims of this study were to investigate the benefits, if any, an outdoor preschool has on children in their early year's education. Research from an Irish viewpoint is extremely limited in this area. The aim and objective of the current study were to:

- 1) To investigate practitioner's views on the advantages and disadvantages, an outdoor preschool has for children's health and development.
- 2) To explore practitioner's views on how outdoor preschools relate to the new Aistear curriculum.
- 3) To explore parental perspectives on why they choose an outdoor setting for their children.
- 4) To investigate both practitioners and parental views of risky play within an outdoor preschool environment.

The dissertation is arranged under a number of chapters. Chapter one introduces the reader to the dissertation. Chapter two presents the relevant literature surrounding the research topic. Chapter three highlights the research process and outlines the method used, as well, as the selection process, which went into selecting participants. Chapter four presents the findings which emerged during the research process. Chapter five discusses the findings of this study in relation to the literature presented within chapter two. Finally, the author then closes this research project with a conclusion.

2.0 Literature Review

“...Children are disappearing from the outdoors at a rate that would make the top of any conservationist’s list of endangered species if they were any other member of the animal kingdom....”

(Gill, 2005; p. 1)

This section will examine research literature in relation to the role of outdoor preschools and the benefits, if any, being in this outdoor environment, has for children, in early year’s education. Research in this area within Ireland is extremely limited. This literature review will begin by looking at: research into the advantages and disadvantages of outdoor preschools on children’s health and development, as well as, looking at how outdoor preschools relate to the new Aistear curriculum. This review will then examine perceptions towards risky play activities within outdoor preschools, before concluding with a justification for this research project.

In recent years, there has been extensive research and initiatives carried out in Ireland to encourage children to embrace and reconnect with their outdoor environment. Initiatives like the National Play Policy (2004) as well as the development of the new early years Aistear curriculum for children 0-6 years, highlight, children as active participants in their own learning. Initiatives like these highlight the outdoors as an essential component for a child’s development and can be seen as vital elements in combating the rising levels of obesity among young children in Ireland. Alarming statistics arising from the Growing up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children (2007), found that, of the 11,110 children participating in the study 1 in 4 three year olds were considered overweight. This could be down to a number of contributing factors including the increase in popularity of technology at a young age, I-pads or the ever so popular Nintendo DSs, a lack of physical activity, as well as, unhealthy eating habits. Research indicates that encouraging children to engage and connect with their outdoor environment can radically change this negative health outcome

(British Medical Association, 2007). Encouraging children to play and reconnect with their outdoor environment is just one of the principles behind the outdoor preschool philosophy.

2.1 The advantages and disadvantage of outdoor preschools for children's health and development.

Within recent years, the role of play within outdoor environments has gained major attention in relation to the benefits it has on children's health and development. This is of particular importance within today's society where children are spending less time engaging in the outdoor environment and more time indoors. Research suggests that this worrying trend may be down to parental safety concerns (Gaster, 1991), the rise in technology for younger generations, as well as, the amount of time spent indoors while at preschool (Boreham and Riddoch, 2001). Tucker (2008) found that children in preschool settings engage in only sixty minutes of outdoor play per day, while this number drops to thirty minutes in winter months. These trends continue to persist despite the attention the outdoor environment is receiving in respect to its benefits for children. Cragg and Cameron, (2006), carried out research with 6,688 young people throughout Canada. Each participant was asked to complete a survey which aimed to investigate a wide range of factors including their physical activity levels. The report found that of the 6,688 respondents 34% had a high level of physical activity and actively participated in a wide variety of sporting activities on a regular bases. 48% of respondents had moderate levels of physical activity, while 19% of respondents engaged in an extremely low level of physical activity. Cragg et al. (2006) identified that the participants who engaged in a high level of physical activity had been exposed to it at an early stage in their lives. This evidence suggests, the importance of young children engaging in physical activity in their early years, as this, encourages and builds the foundation for maintaining an active lifestyle throughout their lives. This is also highlighted by Pate, Baranowski, Dowda, and Trost (1996), who state that children's physical activity level at preschool age has been found to be that same throughout a child's teenage years. This again, highlights the importance of providing children at a young age with the opportunities to engage in physical activity. Strong, Malina, Blimkie, Daniels, Dishman and Gutin (2005), found that physical activity can not only help prevent obesity in young children but also has a positive effect on children's mental well-being, muscular strength and development, as well as, contributing to academic success throughout their lives. When

young children have the opportunity to engage in hands on, outdoor activities, they become more advanced at problem solving, their thinking becomes more creative and they learn more safety skills (Miller, 1989; Rivkin, 2000; Moore, 1997). These are all vital developmental skills to aid them in later life. Mason (2003) states that children in outdoor preschools develop their expressive language skills which increases their self-esteem and sense of worth which, Mason (2003), highlights as leading to academic achievement in later life. While Massey (2002) found within her research into outdoor preschools that children's confidence and independence in trying new things increased dramatically within the outdoor environment. Similar results were also found in research carried out by Murray (2003) and, Eastwood and Mitchell (2003) where the environments within outdoor preschools were found to develop children's confidence, creative thinking, physical development and sense of wonder.

As well as learning and developing these life skills, children, who engage with their outdoor environment on a regular bases are proven according to Louv (2005; p 6) *"to be less sick, stressed, aggressive and more capable of adapting to life's unpredictable turns than children who don't"*. This was also highlighted as an important factor which emerged from research carried out by Kernan (2006) within three childcare settings in Dublin. She found that children who engaged with their outdoor environment for long periods of time had improved appetites and sleep patterns, as well as, a stronger tolerance to illness. When playing outdoors, it has been proven that children advance both academically and emotionally through their growing awareness for their outdoor environment. This is done by involving themselves in imaginative play, which helps to develop a sense of wonder and initiative, while also encouraging them to learning and exploring the objects within their natural environment (Kosanke and Warner, 1990; Guddemi and Eriksen, 1992; Singer and Singer, 2000). Research carried out in this area has also demonstrated that between the ages of three and twelve a child's body experiences its greatest physical growth, this is illustrated through children's desire to run around, climb obstacles, and jump in outdoor environments (Noland, Danner, Dewalt, McFadden and Kotchen, 1990; Kalish, 1995; Cooper, Schwarzenegger and Proctor, 1999; Janz, Dawson and Mahoney, 2000). Opportunities for these type of experiences are extremely limited within indoor settings. These sentiments are echoed by Elliott and Chancellor (2014) who carried out research on the introduction of

outdoor preschools in Australia. This research study was an evaluation of a pilot study on the outdoor preschool model of education. Their research was carried out within a regular preschool setting with a group of 14 preschool aged children. Once a week for a year the group spent the day within the outdoor natural environment, weather appropriate clothing was used to ensure the children could remain outdoors all day regardless of the weather. The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collecting data, in the form of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Both parents and staff members participated in the study which aimed to gauge different perceptions towards outdoor preschools and their value, as well as, challenges they felt this model of education held. The researchers found that children's play changed dramatically when in the outdoors, noting that, children's physical, observation, and imaginative skills improved dramatically while the groups dynamic changed to become more relaxed and collaborative. Parents also identified their children as being calmer and less dependent on indoor toys when engaging in play, and found that their children enjoyed playing with natural materials like stones and sticks. This study could have benefited by conducting additional interviews at the beginning of the pilot study. The research may have obtained more in depth data, such as, what the perceptions of the participants were at the beginning of the pilot study towards this model of early year's education. This would have provided interesting insights into how these perceptions changed throughout the year.

Another important piece of research carried out by Taylor and Kuo (2009) found the benefits a natural environment can have on the attention span of children diagnosed with ADHD. Using a series of puzzles, the attention span of a group of 7-12 year old children were assessed. The children who were all diagnosed with ADHD, were then taken on a series of walks in three different environments, a park, a residential setting and a downtown setting, before repeating the series of puzzles and answering questions about their walk. The results indicated that the children who walked in the natural environment of the park had better concentration levels than the children who had walked in the residential or downtown environments. The children who had walked in the park also preferred their experience more than the children who had walked in the other two environments. Another important result were, the effects on the children's concentration levels who had walked in the park, had been similar to two types of medication commonly used by children with ADHD.

Although most people can agree on the important role of outdoor play in early year's education, results from a study carried out by Early Childhood Ireland and the Sligo Institute of Technology (2013) show that, a major consideration for parents when allowing their children to play outdoors is the weather. It identified that 88% of children played outside less in winter, while 74% of children didn't play outside at all when it is raining. Previous research studies carried out in Australia, United Kingdom, Canada and Ireland also highlight whether, safety concerns and wanting to avoid any risk to children, as barriers to outdoor play and learning for children (Factor 2004, Maynard and Waters, 2007; Kernan and Devine, 2010; Van Zandvoort, Tucker, Irwin and Burke, 2010). This is in spite of numerous policies and procedures in place to support children's access to outdoor environments. Along with the publication of documents such as Nurture through Nature: promoting outdoor play for young children (2006) and Ready, Steady, Play! A National Play Policy (2007), which highlight the positive effects that being in the outdoors, has on children's early year's development. This is of particular relevance to the current study as the author is interested in exploring practitioners and parent's perceptions of outdoor preschool settings, so consequently, as the benefits and challenges of children in the outdoors emerge from the literature, this will form the bases of the author's exploration within this study.

2.2 Linking the learning: Aistear and Outdoor preschools

"The physical environment both indoors and outdoors should stimulate curiosity, inspire creativity, be varied and dynamic, provide a context for activity and play, encourage exploration and support holistic learning and development" (Silota, 2006; p. 19).

Aistear emphasises the importance of children experiencing environmental education in the outdoor environment at the earliest opportunity in life (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, (NCCA) 2009). Within Ireland's new framework for early year's education, experiences with the outdoor environment are highlighted as critical in shaping lifelong attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour towards natural environments (NCCA, 2009). Due to the fact that young children learn about the environment by engaging and interacting with it, it is up to practitioners and other adults to ensure children have significant access to high quality outdoor environments (Massey, 2002).

The formulation in 2009, of the new Aistear early childhood curriculum framework for children from 0-6 years has worked efficiently towards shifting the discourse of Early Years Education towards children taking an active role in their own learning, with a greater focus on the child's own voice (Devine, 2002; Hayes and Kernan, 2008). Ensuring that children have the time and space they need to play outdoors is now recognised both as a need and a right of children and central to their well-being and development (Mackett and Paskins, 2008; Moore, 1997; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation, 2006). When consulted children's desire to play and have time in an outdoor environment has been highlighted as being very important to them (National Children's Strategy, 2000). These trends are evident within policy documents in Ireland, including the National Children's Strategy (2000). The value the outdoors has in providing opportunities for exciting, creative and social contact, can be seen as the foundation within the highly regarded, consultative document on a national curricular framework for early years learning (NCCA, 2004).

Aistear itself means journey, and can be seen as highlighting the journey for children through their childhood years. Aistear highlights four main themes which include: identity and belonging, exploring and thinking, communicating and well-being (NCCA, 2009). The main source of literature in Ireland relating to how activities in the outdoors can relate to the themes within Aistear is a Barnardos publication "Outdoors Matters" (2014). This document highlights, how each theme can be effectively worked into an outdoor preschools learning opportunity for children. The goal relating to Identity and belonging involves increasing children's confidence and self-esteem levels while encouraging them to take an active role in their own learning (Outdoors Matters, 2014). Research carried out by O'Brien and Murray (2007) on the effect of outdoor preschools on children in Wales and England, identifies confidence and self-assurance as key features within outdoor preschools. This according to O'Brien and Murray (2007) comes from the children's freedom to develop and test their independence within the outdoor environment. Massey (2002) within her research into outdoor settings, identifies the key component of outdoor preschools as encouraging the children to take the lead when it come to their own learning, and she also highlights the practitioner's role within an outdoor environment as to encourage and facilitate the children in this process. Learning about the natural environment while becoming familiar with and using a variety of natural materials like rocks and trees, in

creative ways can be seen as an exciting and meaningful way for children to learn under Aistear's goal theme of Exploring and Thinking (Outdoors Matters, 2014). O'Brien and Murray (2007) found that children develop an understanding and interest towards the outdoor environment through exploring the natural materials available. Children are constantly thinking and evolving within these type of settings. Massay (2002), states that, children's fine and gross motor skills improved dramatically within the outdoor environment as children are constantly exploring and thinking about their changing abilities, while having the opportunity to develop these abilities through climbing, jumping and interactions with natural materials like stones and sticks. This feeling is echoed within Aistear's learning goals under this theme (NCCA, 2009). Within the communicating and well-being theme according to Maynard (2003), children's language within outdoor preschools had a meaningful quality to it, he found that children's vocabulary was more developed, while the children were more eager to engage in conversations with adults and other children about their environment and experiences. Bower, Barclay and Hawkey (2002), also identified language and communication skills as a benefit of outdoor schools within their forest school pilot project. Although these studies indicate the link between Aistear and the learning within outdoor settings, Maynard (2003) makes a point of highlighting that there is no evidence to suggest these learning outcomes particularly in regards to communication skills would be any different within regular settings.

2.3 Outdoor preschools and children's risky play

The concept of risky play has been defined as any form of challenging and enjoyable play where there is a threat of physical injury to a child (Adams, 2001). Although this definition exists Sanderset and Kennair (2011) believes that risky play is difficult to define and is based on individual understandings and perceptions, therefore making it subjective. This is similar to the views of Magde and Barker (2007) who also highlight risky play for children as a difficult term to define. Regardless of the difficulty in defining risky play, many researchers have investigated the impact of risk-taking for children and found that risky play activities are vital to children's abilities and development processes (Athey, 1990; Dowling, 2010; Gill, 2007; Greenland, 2006; Moyles, 2010; cited in Smidt, 2010; p 24). Moss and Petrie (2002)

highlighted the fact that children who are not allowed to engage in risky play, are losing out on the chance to develop important life lessons which could benefit them in later life. While Guldberg (2009) found that limiting access to risky play can have a negative impact on the development processes of children. Research carried out by Norfolk environmental and outdoor learning team, (2005); cited in Forest schools- A guide for practitioners, 2009; p. 10, found that children within outdoor settings are more capable of understanding risks as well as the consequences of the risks they take. Maynard (2003) also found that children in outdoor settings are encouraged to take appropriate risks, which shows children are seen as capable beings. This improves their self-esteem and confidence as well as having a positive effect on their physical abilities. Gill (2007) highlights the main reasons why children should be encouraged to partake in risky play, he found that this type of play builds character and resilience which can have a huge positive impact on children throughout their lives. He also identifies that when children engage in risky play it allows them to learn about and understand risk.

During the process of risky play, children learn to take risks, which allows them to learn about their own skills and abilities (Moyles, 2010; cited in Smidt, 2010; p 24; Sandseter and Kennair, 2011). While research shows us the importance of risky play in children's lives, conventional childcare settings are found to be concerned with protecting children and safe environments (Sandseter et al. 2011). While this is important it often involves severely reducing children's opportunities to engage in risky play. Lee, 1999; cited in Christiansen, 1999; p 44, found through his research study that the outdoor environment is the most effective for promoting challenging and dynamic play opportunities for children. This is due to the fact that the outdoors provides natural uneven surfaces, hills and trees, which all contribute themselves to risky play (Sandseter et al. 2011). These ingredients are missing within most designed play areas (Jenkins, 2002; Little, 2006). This was also echoed within research carried out by Ellis (1972), who also highlighted the outdoor environment as providing the most opportunity of risky play. She also identifies risk taking activities as having positive benefits on children's confidence levels. Knight (2011) a leading researcher in the area of outdoor settings highlights a trend she finds worrying in relation to risk taking in the outdoors, she notes that *"this was essential for the healthy development of children... but I became aware whilst training early years practitioners that not all of them are ready to*

embrace this message" (Knight, 2011; p 1). Knight (2011) highlights fear among other reasons for some practitioners not embracing outdoor risky play in particular, fear of children injuring themselves and of what parents might say. Within Ireland's, early year's curriculum Aistear, risk taking is briefly referred to as *"adventurous... helps children to explore the unknown"* (NCCA, 2009; p 53). The current study aims to assess both parents and practitioner's views towards risky play therefore, the interesting insights and themes emerging from the literature will provide a solid starting point for the current studies investigation into this topic.

2.4 Conclusion

The aim of this research study was to explore the benefits, if any, an outdoor preschool has on children in their early year's education. This research was conducted using the qualitative research method of interviews in order to ensure in-depth, quality data was obtained. The author examined practitioner's views on the advantages and disadvantages, an outdoor preschool has for children's health and development. As well as, establishing practitioner's views on how outdoor preschools relate to the new Aistear curriculum. Additionally, the study explored parental perspectives, as to why, they choose an outdoor setting for their children. Furthermore, the author investigated both practitioners and parental views of risky play within an outdoor preschool environment.

While the concept of outdoor/forest preschools was a well-researched topic, in other countries, the author felt that as this model of education was relatively new in Ireland, and so it is an area in need of further research. There is a dearth of research carried out from an Irish perspective on this topic, as it relates to early years education in Ireland. The author also felt that since the introduction of the free preschool years in 2010, preschools are in high demand. This places them, in an excellent position to develop and foster young children's appreciation for the outdoors and the opportunities it can provide for their health and development. This research study could provide a solid starting point for future research on the value outdoor preschools can have in this area, especially from an Irish standpoint. Additionally, it could provide people with an interest in alternative models of

early years care with information surrounding the principals of outdoor preschools. There was also a severe lack of information surrounding this area from Irish viewpoint.

This chapter outlined and discussed a selection of research which explored the advantages and disadvantages the outdoors has on children's health and development. It then discussed how Aistear and the outdoor preschool model of education can be linked. Furthermore, it investigated outdoor preschools and children's risky play. Finally, it made reference to the current study and provided the authors justification for conducting this piece of research. The next chapter will focus on the methodological approach used to carry out this research project.

3. Methodology Section

This chapter will detail the methodological approach taken in this research project, by highlighting the research design and the process of data collection. Firstly, the aims and objectives of this study will be reviewed before discussing the methodological approach used. The participants, data collection and materials used, will then be discussed before concluding this chapter, by highlighting the ethical considerations which shaped the research process, in addition to the delimitations of this study.

3.1 Design

This piece of research did not aim to generalise findings, but to gain individual parents and early year's practitioner's perspectives, based on their views and knowledge regarding an outdoor preschool experience for children in their early years. Therefore, a qualitative interpretive methodological approach was selected. There were a number of reasons for choosing this approach. Firstly, it is not the aim of interpretive researchers to make generalisations, instead, they attempt to gain a wide range of perceptions from different people based on their views, while using small sample sizes to gain in-depth views from participants (Robert- Holmes, 2005). Hatch (1995) highlights the interpretive approach as a method which facilitates researchers in understanding participant's views and perceptions. Qualitative researchers actively listen to participant's views and are open to continuous adjustment and discovery as it happens (Hays and Singh, 2011). Rhedding- Jones (2005) also highlights the qualitative, interpretive approach, as having more of an impact on research carried out within the early year's arena than any other research method. The use of a

qualitative approach was particularly relevant within the present study, as it enabled the author to engage with, and gain in-depth views of individuals who had experience and knowledge surrounding this model of education. As the aims and objectives focus on parents and early years educators perceptions the author felt a qualitative approach was the most effective way to ensure these aims were achieved.

Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), identify interviews as the most popular method of collecting data when conducting qualitative research. Holstein and Gubruim (1995) also support this view, highlighting the use of interviews as a well-respected tool for data collection within the research world. Interviews allow participants to have their say on issues while sharing their views and experiences, with the interviewer (Holstein and Gubruim, 1995). Within the qualitative approach, interviews can be separated into three categories: unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews (Denscombe, 2010; Mukherji and Albon, 2010; Roberts- Holmes, 2011). Within the current research study, topics and sample questions were prepared in advance of the interviews, therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection within this study. This helped to keep the interviews focused on the research aims and objectives and ensure relevant, in-depth data was obtained (Kvale, 2007). Although sample questions were developed in advance of the interviews, questions were elaborated upon and tailored according to participant's responses. This was an advantage of using this method, as it allowed an opportunity to probe the participant's responses partic

ularly, when a topic emerged that the author had not considered. Participant's non-verbal cues like body language and facial expressions were also observed during interviews. This further extended their responses. The use of semi-structured interviews within the present study, allowed for participants to think about their responses. This gave them the opportunity within the interview to ask for clarity on questions they may have been unsure of. This would not have been possible if a quantitative research method like questionnaires had been chosen.

As this was the first time the author was using interviews as a method of collecting data. It was vital to ensure questions were not leading in a particular way, and were relevant to the present studies, aims and objectives. Participants were given adequate time to give their perceptions, however, it was important that the author was aware of power dynamics and

personal bias within the interview process. This was vital, not only to ensure the process ran smoothly, that questions were relevant to the studies aims and objectives, as well as, to ensure that it was a positive experience for all participants. The author was also aware of how her own attitude, body language and feelings could impact on the responses of the interviewees. Therefore the author ensured she kept a warm, natural composure throughout each interview. This helped to ensure respondents felt comfortable to give their honest perceptions. The author felt, audio recording the interviews benefited the participants, by ensuring the respondent's views were recorded, therefore nothing was missed. This may have happened if each interview had to be transcribed by hand. It also benefited the respondents as it allowed the author to fully engage with each participant and ensure they felt their opinions were being heard and respected.

Data from the interviews was audio recorded and transcribed personally by the author. The method of thematic analysis was chosen as the method of transcribing the data within this piece of research. Bryman (2012), highlights this technique as a popular method of data analysis within qualitative research. The interviews were listened to numerous times, until themes began to emerge. Although this was a time consuming process, it allowed the author to become familiar with each interview and see the relationship between the emerging themes and the studies aims and objectives. Seeing these connections according to Bryman (2012), connects the researchers with the data analysis process.

3.2 Materials

The materials used during the process of completing this research study included, a proposal form for each participant (see Appendix 1). This stating the aims and objectives of the study and what the role of each participant would be. Parents and early year's educators (See Appendix 2), were also given consent letters, asking for their consent to participant in an interview and to have the interview audio recorded. A schedule of topics the interview would cover (see Appendix 3), an audio recorder and a laptop were also used.

Proposal forms were given to participants, providing them with information on the topic being researched, the main aims and objectives of the study as well as how the study involved them. Consent was obtained from all participants via consent letters. This again,

explained the aims and objectives of the study, as well as, asked for their consent to participate in an interview and to have the interview audio recorded. Once consent was obtained participants were given a schedule of topics the interview would cover. This included questions relating to practitioners and parents perceptions of outdoor preschools, views on risky play activities, as well as, how the new Aistear curriculum and outdoor preschools related to one another. A laptop was used to transcribe each interview and compile the results of this study.

3.3 Participants

In order to achieve the objectives of this research project, the author choose to use purposive sampling when choosing participants. Purposive sampling is described as a non-probability sampling method, which recognises, that people participating in a study are not required to be representative of the population (Mukherji and Albon, 2010). The author felt this was the most appropriate method, as the concept of purposive sampling is to choose individuals to participate in one's research, based on their ability to contribute in-depth, high quality information towards a research studies aims and objectives (Gall et al. 2007). The study comprised of eight participants, four early years' practitioners and four parents. Participants were chosen according to specific criteria. The practitioners had to have, or had experience working within an outdoor preschool setting, while the parents had to have, or had a child attending an outdoor setting. The sample group consisted of eight females. The four parents involved had two male and two female children between them attending an outdoor setting. All the staff involved had early year's qualifications and varying levels of experience, working in a wide range of different settings, including both regular and outdoor preschool settings.

3.4 Procedure

In order to find participants to participate in the research study the author visited a range of outdoor settings. This ensured the author was there in person to explain the purpose of the study, the participants needed and to answer any questions they had. Each setting acted as

gatekeeper to the parents and to practitioners, they informed them of my research topic and asked for volunteers. The author then left the preschool settings with the information sheet, for two weeks to ensure they had adequate time to decide if they wanted to partake or if they had any further questions. Once participants had volunteered to participate, the author returned to the settings with consent forms for each participant to sign. An agreed date and time was arranged for the interviews and a list of sample questions was provided to each participant. This helped put any nerves at ease and give them a further understanding of the topics that were to be discussed. It was explained to participants that the list of questions acted as a guide only, this was to ensure participants were given the opportunity to discuss issues that the author may not have considered (Tracy, 2010). Each interview was conducted by the author, using a location chosen by the participants. This was important as participants would be at ease within an environment chosen by themselves. The author arrived early to access the chosen location in order to find the quietest area to avoid disruptions. This was vital in ensuring the participants had an appropriate level of confidentiality while carrying out the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minute and was audio recorded with the permission of participants (see Appendix 2). This allowed the author to fully engage in what the participants were saying and observe participants non-verbal cues in response to questions asked.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

As with any piece of research, ethical considerations played a major role within this research project. The main documents which informed the ethical considerations for this study were the Nuremburg Code (1949), as well as, Tracy's (2010) eight "big tent" criteria for excellent quality research. The main points surrounding ethical considerations within these documents highlight the importance of informed voluntary consent from all participants, the value of confidentiality in research, as well as, ensuring your research is of value and avoids any unnecessary risk or harm to participants both mentally and physically. An important quote which Homan (1992; p. 326) highlights, resonated strongly with the author during the research process, "many researchers think their moral obligation begins and ends with the signing of the consent letter". The author strived to ensure this was not the case within this study. At all times, the ethical considerations of participants and the settings

which parent's children attended were given the upmost attention. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and the topic of this study was verbally explained to everyone involved. The issue of confidentiality and anonymity were also explained and participants were assured these issues would be held in the highest regard, by withholding the names of each setting within the research study or including participant's real names. The author ensured the limitations which confidentiality had, were also explained to each participant. Anything told to the author by any participant would be held in the strictest of confidence unless it affected their wellbeing. In this case it would have to be reported to the author's supervisor in order to help resolve the issue. The principal of non-harmful procedures were also abided by, therefore participants were not offered any incentive to partake in the research study. Participants were also informed that all data and identifying records would be kept in a locked filing cabinet and would be destroyed once the study was completed. Before each interview participants were given sample interview questions, this gave them an opportunity to ask for clarification on any topic or bring any concerns they may have, to the author's attention. Each participant was also informed of their right to opt out of the study at any time. Participants were also informed that they didn't have to be audio recorded if they felt uncomfortable by it. In line with Tracy (2010), having completed this research the author met with each participant, thanked them for participating, and gave them a copy of the study.

3.6 Delimitations

The delimitations utilized by the author within this research study were determined by desire to gain a better understanding of the role outdoor preschools have for children in their early year's education. The author only sought participants in this study who had experience working within an outdoor preschool setting and whose children attended an outdoor preschool. This prevented the author from gaining the perspective from other early years experts, for example, County Childcare Committee members who may have had expert knowledge in this area. The use of a small sample size within this study has had an impact upon its findings. The results found cannot be generalised to the wider population and are only representative of the people involved in this research project.

The use of interviews can also be seen as a limitation of this study. The use of a mixed method approach, for example, interviews and questionnaires could have provided more generalised findings. This would have allowed for a larger sample size to be considered. Therefore it would have offered further depth to the results of this study, due to a wider range of perceptions. As the author was new to using interviews as a method collecting technique it could be argued that, although unintentionally, this could have impacted the results in some way. The nerves, body language and personal bias of the researcher could have impact the responses of the interviewees without the researcher realising.

This chapter outlined the research methodology used to carry out this research study. It also outlined the materials used and gave insight into how the participants were selected. It then discussed how consent was obtained, as well as, discussing the procedure used to carry out and transcribe each interview before finally, highlighting the ethical considerations and delimitations within this research study. The next section within this research study will focus on the results which emerged from the semi structured interviews.

4. Results Section

The results section of this research project outlines and highlights the main data which emerged throughout the research process. The data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012). The themes which emerged and are discussed in this section relate to the objectives of this research study, and are organised as follows: firstly, practitioner's views on the role, if any, an outdoor preschool, has for children are offered, secondly to investigate practitioner's views on how outdoor preschools relate to the new Aistear curriculum are detailed. Explorations of parental perspectives on why they choose an outdoor setting for their children follows, and finally both practitioners' and parental views of risky play within an outdoor preschool environment are presented.

4.1 The advantages and disadvantages, an outdoor preschool has for children's health and development.

The main themes which emerged under this objective were the benefits the outdoor environment has on children's health and development. All the practitioners interviewed (four) observed that children's health and development was significantly better than children who attended a regular setting. Words like "*sturdier*" "*hardier*" and "*tougher*" were all used to describe children who attended outdoor settings. Some participants highlighted the outdoor environment as contributing to the development of stronger immune systems in children, with one respondent stating that in her experience,

“Children in outdoor preschools build a kind of higher tolerance to germs, they also miss less days due to illness, to children who attend regular settings I think”.

This sentiment was mirrored by all the practitioners with another respondent highlighting that,

“Children who are inside all day or are only getting out when the weather is good, pick up different colds and flus all the time. When the children are outside all day, in weather appropriate clothing they catch less germs, so I think they miss less days”.

Practitioners also indicated children’s development as being more advanced, when in outdoor preschools especially in terms of their thinking and creative development. One respondent highlighted children in outdoor preschools as being,

“Crafty thinkers who know how to use their initiative”

She highlighted a specific example to illustrate this opinion,

“We had a boy one day who wanted to play with water so I told him I would open the polytunnel in two minutes and he could play with the water, I turn around literally a minute later and he had a cup of water in his hand, I asked him where he got the water and because he was such a crafty thinker he had walked over to the tyres, there was water in the rim of one of them because it had been raining and took the water from there, I mean you couldn’t write this stuff”.

Three practitioners also stated that when in the outdoor environment, children have more of an opportunity to develop their thinking and creative development with one respondent stating that,

“children in the outdoors environment can decide for themselves how to use the natural material on offer to them, no one is telling them how they’re supposed to play with things they decide that for themselves and because their outside every day their environment is constantly changing, while in indoor environments, children can often be told how to play and use things the “right” way as opposed to just letting them figure it out for themselves”

While another respondent echoed a similar opinion but stated that she felt this came down to the practitioners involved with the children, not just the environment they were in. Each practitioner interviewed also stated that in their opinions children in outdoor preschools have more of an opportunity to enhance their physical development, than if they were in an indoor setting. Multiple reasons for this were given including indoor preschools having rules like *“no running or jumping”*, *“practitioners fear that children would hurt themselves if they ran indoors”* and *“a lack of space in indoor settings including their outdoor areas”*. While all practitioners felt children in outdoor settings had more freedom to develop their physical development as they had more space, more natural equipment like trees and hills.

Practitioners were asked what, disadvantages could outdoor preschools have on children’s health and development. Out of the four practitioners interviewed, three felt there were none. While one highlighted that unless adequate, weather appropriate clothing were worn, the weather would have a major impact on children’s health especially when dealing with Ireland’s ever-changing weather,

“Unless children are wrapped up well in the harsh weather, they could get very sick”.

All four of the respondents interviewed felt that the benefits of an outdoor preschool could not compare to those of a regular setting. This was due to the fact that outdoor environments within outdoor settings were, ever changing and according to the practitioners, offered a different level of hands on experience which could not be replicated indoors,

“I have always been of the opinion that children should be in the outdoor classroom. It can provide so much more opportunity for children than the indoor one ever could”

Under this objective practitioners were also asked about the barriers to childcare settings both regular and outdoors, having high quality outdoor environment especially when they felt the benefits of the outdoor settings were so important for children. Knowledge and support emerged as the biggest themes here. All practitioners interviewed felt that there was not enough knowledge or support among early year’s practitioners and managers as to the value of outdoor preschools or on how to fully utilise the outdoor areas within regular preschools. One respondent, stated,

“County Childcare Committee’s and other organisations will tell you the importance of getting children outdoors but there’s a big difference between getting outside for half an hour and being outside all day, every day, in every kind of weather”.

Another respondent felt that while practitioners and managers may feel they know the benefits being outdoors has for children, it’s not being put into practice in a meaningful way. Respondents also highlighted terms like *“hassle”* and *“too much effort”* on behalf of early years settings, when discussing the barriers to high quality outdoor environments. Two respondents highlighted the time and research that has to go into developing outdoor environments with one respondent explaining a training course she went on to help her learn more about utilising outdoor environments to their full potential,

“a lady came over from Scotland, where she has her own outdoor preschool in a forest, so she came here and taught us how to set up fires, how to, use the natural resources we already have within the outdoor environment. It doesn’t matter if you have a little square of garden or a massive garden”.

Another respondent felt that although there was little support for outdoor preschools at present this would change in the coming years indicating that it would *“grow and grow and grow”* she also highlighted *“word of mouth”* as a great thing to facilitate the growing of outdoor settings in the future.

4.2 Practitioner’s views on how outdoor preschools relate to the new Aistear curriculum.

All practitioners interviewed had similar opinions as to how outdoor preschools related to Aistear under its four headings: identity and belonging, communication, wellbeing and exploring and thinking.

When it came to identity and belonging statements like *“active in their own learning”*, *“feeling a part of the setting”* and *“having a voice”* were all expressed as views respondents had as how outdoor preschools encourage this Aistear theme. Three respondents felt it was important children had a voice when it came to their own learning, with one respondent stating that,

“A major part of Aistear is ensuring children are active participants in their own learning. Outdoor preschools just like indoor preschools have daily plans, but it’s vital that if children have different ideas on how the daily plan works that their voice is heard and plans are adapted according to their preferences”.

“I think that it is really important in outdoor settings, as the environment is changing daily and the children are discovering new ways to play with things”.

Three respondents also felt outdoor preschools provided more opportunity for children to *“direct and take charge of their own learning”* Two participants put this down to regular preschools having more cleaning to do, which they felt impacted the amount of activities children could engage in at any given time, especially when it came to *“messy play activities”*. One respondent stated,

“In my experience if you have a group of 11 pre-schoolers in a classroom with some wanting to paint, others wanting to do play dough and water play, you just don’t have the time to set up and clean up after these activities, I know Aistear wants us to let children do what they want but realistically it’s not always possible indoors, while in an outdoor setting if children make a mess you don’t have to clean it, water will dry, and paint will wash away with the rain, it just take pressure off staff I think, and lets us engage more with the children rather than worrying about the mess we have to clean up”.

Practitioners were in agreement with their responses when it came to the theme of exploring and thinking, with all respondents stating that they felt outdoor preschools definitely related well with this theme. Multiple examples were given here including,

“Children are constantly exploring and thinking about how to use things”

“Their (children) always climbing in and out of tires thinking about new ways to use them”

One respondent highlighted a scene she has witnessed among children in an outdoor setting,

“they (the children) were playing with a log of wood, one minute it was a snake, they were running around it pretending it was trying to bite them and the next they had

balanced it on two tree stumps and were using it to climb across a “river”, you just don’t see those things in regular settings. In my opinion children in regular settings don’t get outside enough with natural materials to develop their thinking and experience those type of things”.

Another respondent redirected me to the story of the little boy wanting to play with water which I have mentioned above to illustrate this theme in action within an outdoor setting.

“That little boy, most definitely used his thinking and exploring skills to find that water”.

Within the Aistear themes of communication and wellbeing, similar responses emerged. One respondent highlighted children as seeming “*happier*” in the outdoor environment, while another respondent stated,

“In my experience I find children in outdoor settings are happier and more content, if you walk into an indoor settings classroom you will most likely hear someone crying, whereas if you walk into an outdoor setting you are less likely to hear crying, I think this comes down to the fact the outdoor settings have more space and freedom”.

All participants shared similar views when it came to communication, highlighting that it is an active component of outdoor preschools,

“Children are constantly developing and enhancing their communication skills with staff and other children, they are eager to tell you what they are doing and the new ways they have discovered to using materials within their play”.

Practitioners were also asked, in accordance with Aistear, what they saw their role as within their day-to-day interactions with children within outdoor settings. Practitioners again had similar views, themes like “*encouraging children to think for themselves*”, “*observing and extending children’s play*” and “*provide the environment for children to explore and interact with the natural environment*” all emerged. One respondent stated that,

“I don’t think my role has really changed too much since Aistear came in, I’ve always felt it was my role to encourage children to think for themselves, if anything Aistear has really highlighted to me the importance of listening to children and ensuring my daily plans are flexible with regards to their interests on any given day”.

While another respondent highlighted how she felt her role was to observe their play and offer suggestions to help extend children's learning,

"Like the other day I observed the children playing with a barrel they were climbing in and out of it, when it fell over, some of the children started to get upset, so I suggested that they leave the barrel flat and climb in it, before I knew it the children themselves had extended this by leaving the barrel flat, climbing into it and rolling down the hill. I offered my suggestion and they ran with it! It just developed from there!"

4.3 Parental perspectives on why they choose an outdoor setting for their children.

Parents had multiple responses when it came to the reasons they choose outdoor settings for their children,

"We didn't have a garden at the time so we thought it would be nice for her to have time outside in a setting like this",

"My child suffers from allergies, it was supposed to be better for them",

Another respondent found,

"I think it just suited my child's personality more than a regular setting"

While one respondent felt,

"our child would have more fun in this type of setting and when I looked into it a bit more I found that children were less sick in the outdoors, so we felt it would be a win-win situation".

Parents were also asked if they felt supported in terms of information on outdoor settings, as well as, if they felt this model of early year's education should be developed further in Ireland. Parents were in agreement in both these areas, with respondents stating that there was a definite lack of information on these types of settings,

“I guess there wasn’t a lot of examples of it, so in one way we weren’t sure what to expect”.

Two respondents highlighted the internet as their main source of information while all four respondents found that the settings themselves were invaluable when it came to information relating to outdoor preschools. One respondent felt,

“The girls (practitioners) were so positive about its benefits and so eager to alleviate any fears or worries I had about sending my child there”.

Another stated,

“Because the girls were also learning about this form of early year’s education, it was new to them also, but you could see the enthusiasm they had, they really believed in it”

The respondents had similar views on the future development of outdoor settings in Ireland, all agreeing they would,

“Love to see it grow and grow” “it’s a wonderful model of care especially for families who may not have access to appropriate play areas where they live”,

“I feel children are happier and healthier in these type of environments, so yes I would love to see them spread all over the country”.

When parents were asked how being in the outdoor setting had contributed to their children’s development, multiple themes emerged, the development of children’s health and immune system, more appreciation to being outdoors, and developing their confidence.

“My child is so much more confident in everything she does and I feel she’s more capable as well”,

One respondent found that since attending this type of setting her children had less inhibitions when it came to dirt or bad weather, *“my daughter would pick up a snail or something and just hold it her hand no problem”.* Another respondent added that her child was, *“physically stronger, her balance and concentration is just much better”.* One respondent highlighted that she also felt the outdoor environment,

“gives them a sense of freedom that at times, they can be a little reckless like, I’m not sure if it just because we don’t let her out on the street so she just doesn’t realise, but she has no concept of cars or things, she just thinks everywhere is a big place you can run around in”

4.4 To investigate practitioners and parental views of risky play within an outdoor preschool environment.

Practitioners were asked about their views of what risky play was and their understandings of why children engage in such activities. All interviewees had similar opinions on what risky play was, describing it as *“something they (children) could get really hurt doing”*, *“pushing boundaries or testing their (children’s) limits”* and *“an activity which could impact a child detrimentally”* all emerged as respondent’s views as to what risky play was. When asked why they felt children engaged in risky play, practitioners felt it was to *“have fun”*, *“challenge themselves”*, *“explore and test their limits”*, and *“curiosity, to see what will happen if I do this”*. One respondent highlighted risky play as a vital component to children’s development,

“They need to push the boundaries of their abilities in order to enhance their development and learn new things”.

All respondents felt that children had more of an opportunity to engage in risky play in outdoor settings. One respondent highlighted indoor settings as having *“rules and less space to engage in risky activities”*. Respondents viewed the *“trees”*, *“water”*, *“hills”* and *“uneven surfaces”* as opportunities the outdoor preschools hold for children to engage in risky play activities. One respondent stated that although she had experience working within regular settings that had nice outdoor areas, children’s access to natural outdoor risky activities were absent due to *“plastic toys and fake grass”*. Respondents gave many examples as to how outdoor settings provide opportunities for children to engage in risky play *“climbing trees”* *“rolling down hills”* *“creating a waterslide out of water and mud”*. One respondent highlighted,

“In many outdoor setting children have access to many adult materials like in a construction corner, they may have access to real tools while in the home corner children could have access to real plates, knives and forks all of which carry a significant risk, in my experience many regular settings use plastic kitchen and construction items therefore the risk is significantly lowered, however in my opinion so is the learning experience”

Another respondent stated that

“When children have access to these risky activities they learn how to assess risk, doing so within a safe environment and setting them up for assessing risk in the future”.

When asked about the barriers to children’s engagement in risky play, three respondents highlighted parents as the major barrier.

“It’s hard to explain to a parent why their child hurt themselves, sometimes they find it hard to understand”.

One respondent felt that,

“Sometimes it can be hard to explain it to parents, like they don’t really understand why their child was in a situation where they could get hurt, you can explain it to them, the value of risky play for children but I don’t think they fully understand it”

Another respondent explained how, since becoming a parent,

“I feel I look at situations differently now and I do worry more about the children when they’re doing something risky, even though I know it’s important for their development, I can’t help worrying more”.

One respondent also identifies children’s own insecurities as a barrier for their engagement in risk taking activities *“sometimes they feel they can’t do it, or their not ready to try”.*

When asked about how these barriers could be overcome respondents identified a *“change in attitude”* towards this type of play from both parents and staff. One respondent felt that not all early years educators could work in an outdoor setting and see children engaging in risky play,

“I know staff I have worked with who would definitely not be able to see children climbing trees no way, it’s not for everyone”.

Another respondent felt that although practitioners know the value of risky play for children, not all practitioners encouraged it in their settings. All respondents felt that although parents are consulted on risky play within settings, more was needed to help put parents at ease more. One respondent identified how at the beginning of the year a “parents evening” was held where parents were shown “slideshows” of children engaging in risk taking activities, they are told the benefits and importance of it and advised that their children would have the opportunity to engage in such activities if they wish to. Another respondent found that having “charts” and “photos” of children engaging in risky play, where parents can see them was a useful tool to educate them. While two respondents identified “open conversation” on this topic as a good way to change people’s attitudes towards this type of play.

Parents were also asked for their perspectives on risky play within an outdoor setting. While all the respondents felt risky play was important for a child’s development, one respondent highlighted her own “cautiousness” as a barrier for her children’s engagement in these type of activities.

“I’m a terrible cautious person with my kids, I’m probably the worst person with risky play”,

Another respondent found that her view on risky play had changed since having her second child,

“With my first child I worried about everything even grazed knees! but since having my second child I feel this has changed, I’m less overprotective with things like that, I think it may have a lot to do with learning more about risky play since having my children in a setting, your hearing more about it so you’re learning more yourself as a parent, as to its values”.

One respondent found that “personal preference has a lot to with it, I can’t imagine myself being able to do it so I think they can’t”. When asked why, they felt children engaged in risk taking activities, numerous responses were given including “to test their own ability” “to

overcome fears” *“to push boundaries”* and *“curiosity, they see other children doing it so they want to try it as well”*. One respondent stated that although she felt it was important for children to engage in risky play, and for children to *“do things that their afraid of”* she also felt it was important to *“balance this out with something that’s not dangerous”*.

Parents were also asked for their views on what they felt the advantages and disadvantages, if any, to children engaging in risky play. Respondents felt that the advantages of engaging in such activities, were similar to, why children engaged in such activities,

“To learn the limits of their abilities” “to overcome fears” “to mentally learn from it” and “to discover different ways of doing things”.

All respondents has similar feelings as to the disadvantages *“that children would hurt themselves”*. One respondent also felt that if a child was trying to do something like climb a tree and failed that this may hamper their self-esteem and confidence to try things again in the future.

Practitioners were also asked for their views on Aistear and children’s risky play activities. Three respondents felt Aistear really supported children’s engagement in such activities due to its child lead focus. One respondent felt however that although risky play,

“can be incorporated within each of Aistear’s four themes, I think its watered down, I don’t think it gives a clear enough definition of what they see as risk taking or risky activities, which leaves it up to practitioners and managers to interpret this for themselves, I’m not really explaining it very well! but basically I think because of a lack of a clear definition within Aistear it’s down to practitioners own opinions and some may not see the full value of risk taking, so children could end up missing out on important developmental stages”.

In summary, all practitioners felt that being in the outdoor environment had a positive effect on children especially in relation to their health and development. This included children’s thinking and creative development as well as their physical development. The health benefits of being in the outdoor environment were also reasons parents gave as to why they choose this type of setting for their children. When asked for the disadvantages of

being in an outdoor preschool the majority of practitioners felt there were none, while one respondent highlighted inadequate clothing when in bad weather as a disadvantage. All practitioners interviewed felt Aistear and the learning within outdoor preschools could be linked to one another quite well. Each offered examples of the type of learning children engaged in within these types of settings and the themes within Aistear they felt, would it fit in with best. While the majority of practitioners felt risky play was supported within the Aistear curriculum, when probed further as to how they felt it was supported respondents struggled to connect the two, citing its child lead approach as the main reason. One respondent however disagreed on this point, believing that Aistear's lack of a clear definition towards risky play placed the onus on individual practitioners to decide how much risk children were exposed to.

Although practitioners and parents expressed their desire for this type of early years education to grow within Ireland. They felt unsupported in terms of information regarding outdoor settings. Practitioners felt organisations and research focused on the importance of outdoor activity for children, but failed to offer support on how to put this into practice effectively, in particular in preschools where children are outdoors all day. Parents found they struggled to obtain good quality information on these types of settings when first considering enrolling their children, citing the internet and the practitioners within the settings as their main source of information.

This section outlined and highlighted the main results which emerged from the semi structured interviews, carried out as part of this research project. The next section will elaborate on these results and discuss them in relation to literature discussed in chapter two of this study.

5. Discussion

The section which follows, will discuss the main themes, which emerged from this research project, in the context of, the relevant literature found within chapter two by, providing an evaluation of the research and suggestions for future research. This section will then concludes with an overall summary and conclusion.

Findings from this study found that all practitioners and parents felt the advantages of being in the outdoor environment outweighed any disadvantages. Respondents felt outdoor preschools benefited children's immune systems, cognitive and physical development. All practitioners felt outdoor preschools linked in with Aistears four main learning goals and

provided examples and stories to illustrate this. While all participants agreed risky play was beneficial for children's development, they cited personal perceptions of parents and practitioners as barrier to children's engagement in this sort of play. On the topic of risky play and if it is supported within Aistear, the majority of practitioners felt it was, however they struggled to give examples of the way in which it was supported, citing its child lead approach as the main way. Both parents and practitioners within this study felt unsupported when it came to accessing information in relation to this method of education.

5.1 Practitioner's views on the advantages and disadvantages of an outdoor setting on children's health and development.

The first topic which emerged under this objective was the benefits practitioners felt being in the outdoors had for children's health and development. All four respondents had similar views on this issue. However, the researcher observed that two respondents compared its health benefits, to those of children within a regular setting, stating that *"children in outdoor preschools build a kind of higher tolerance to germs, they also miss less days due to illness to children who attend regular settings I think"*. This opinion is supported within literature by many researchers including Louv (2005), who found within her research that children who are in contact with the outdoor environment are less likely to be sick than those who aren't. Another theme which emerged from the responses of the practitioners, were the benefits they felt the outdoor environment, within outdoor preschools had on children's thinking and creative development. One respondent highlighted children in outdoor preschools as being *"crafty thinkers who know how to use their initiative"*. This is in line with Elliott's et al. (2014) research on the introduction of outdoor preschools in Australia, who found that children's play changed dramatically when in the outdoors. They found that children's observation and imaginative skills improved dramatically. This view is also supported by Miller (1989), Rivkin (2000) and Moore and Wong, (1997) who identify the hands on learning experience within the outdoor environment as contributing to children's advanced problem solving and creative thinking abilities. The practitioners interviewed briefly highlighted the advantages outdoor preschools have on children's physical development. Again the researcher observed that all four respondents compared the indoor and outdoor preschool settings when addressing this question, although not

having been specifically asked to. Respondents felt children in outdoor settings had more freedom to develop their physical development, as they had more space and more natural equipment like trees and hills. While respondents felt that indoor preschools could not provide these opportunities, multiple reasons were given for this, including, the view that indoor preschools have rules regarding no running or jumping, practitioners fear that children would hurt themselves if they ran indoors, and a lack of space in indoor settings, including within their outdoor areas. Research also supports these views which Noland et al. (1990), Kalish (1995), Cooper et al. (1999) and Janz et al. (2000) all identifying that between the ages of three and twelve a child's body experiences its greatest physical growth. This is demonstrated by the children's need to run, climb, and jump in outdoor environments. Lee (1999), too, found through his research study that the outdoor environment was the most effective for promoting challenging and dynamic play opportunities for children. While literature focuses on the physical benefits of the outdoors as vital to children's long term development (Cragg & Cameron, 2006; Pate, Baranowski, Dowda & Trost, (1996); and Tucker, 2008), the author found, that within the current study the physical benefits featured more predominantly within the parents responses discussed later, as opposed to practitioner's responses.

Another interesting benefit of outdoor preschools, identified during an interview with a practitioner, were her thoughts on how gender stereotypes or gender specific play were eliminated within the outdoor environment, something which she felt played a role within regular settings. This was an unexpected topic to emerge from the interview, and something the author had failed to come across within the literature surrounding outdoor environments. The researcher observed that this respondent was the oldest of the four practitioners interviewed and had the most experience working within both indoor and outdoor settings. This was an interesting aspect to arise from the interview with the respondent and could form an interesting bases for future research.

Practitioners were also asked about the barriers, if any, they felt childcare settings, both regular and outdoors may have in ensuring high quality outdoor environments for children. Knowledge and support emerged as the biggest themes here. All practitioners interviewed felt that there was not enough knowledge or support among early year's practitioners and managers as to the value of outdoor preschools, or on how, to fully utilise the outdoor areas

within regular preschools. One respondent, stated, *“county childcare committees and other organisations will tell you the importance of getting children outdoors but there’s a big difference between getting outside for half an hour and being outside every day, all day in every kind of weather”*. While it could be considered that literature is flooded with research on the benefits of the outdoors for children, for example, Miller (1989), Rivkin (1995), Moore et al. (1997), Eastwood et al. (2003) and Louv’s (2005), the author also found during this research process, that, research tends to focus on outdoors in general term, for example, parks. There is a lack of research which specifically looks at preschool settings. The amount of time, effort and investment which goes into ensuring an outdoor area can provide high quality learning experiences were also cited as barriers. This is in spite of literature stating that children having time and appropriate space in the outdoors is not only a need but also a right (Mackett, et al.; Moore, 1997). Massey (2002) also highlights the importance of a high quality outdoor play area for children, identifying it as fundamental to ensuring children engage and learn about the outdoor environment.

5.2 To investigate practitioner’s views on how outdoor preschools relate to the new Aistear curriculum.

All respondents felt confident that outdoor preschools related to the main themes within the Aistear curriculum. Each illustrated their opinions with examples of different activities children engaged in, within an outdoor preschool, and the themes they felt the activities fell under. These were similar examples to those highlighted within Barnardos publication *“Outdoors Matter”*. One could conclude that this document has been a leading influence in this area. Under the theme identity and belonging *“having a voice”* and being able to *“direct and take charge of their own learning”* were highlighted as ways in which Aistear and outdoor preschools relate to each other. These are the main focus within outdoor preschools settings. This is supported by the research of Devine (2002) and Hayes et al. (2008) who highlight children taking a lead in their own learning as a vital component of the new curriculum. Practitioners were in agreement with their responses when it came to the theme of exploring and thinking, with all respondents, stating that they felt outdoor preschools definitely related well with this theme. This is also echoed within research by O

'Brien and Murray (2007) who identify the freedom children have within outdoor preschools as a stimulant for children to explore, therefore their thinking is constantly evolving.

Within the Aistear themes of communication and wellbeing similar responses emerged, with one respondent highlighting that children seemed "*happier*" in the outdoor environment while another respondent stated children were "*more content*". All participants shared similar views when it came to communication, highlighting that it is an active component of outdoor preschools. Bower et al. (2002) also identified language and communication skills as a benefit of outdoor preschools within their forest school pilot project. Maynard (2003) also highlights children in outdoor preschools as having more meaningful language. She also found that children's vocabulary was more developed, while children were eager to engage in conversations about their environment and experiences. Practitioners were eager to express their opinions on this topic, stating that the children loved to discuss what they were doing and the new ways in which they had discovered to use objects. Literature and results from this study, highlight children as being eager to communicate with others about discoveries they've made or new ways they've found to use objects. One could hypostasise that the child lead approach within Aistear allows for and encourages this, by emphasising the importance of children directing their own play. This could be resulting in children effectively developing their exploring, thinking and communicating skills at a more advanced rate.

Practitioners were also asked, in accordance with Aistear what they saw as their role within their day-to-day interactions with children within outdoor settings. Practitioners again had similar views, emphasising the importance of "*encouraging children to think for themselves*", and "*observing and extending children's play*" in addition to, "*providing the environment for children to explore and interact with the natural environment*". Massey (2002) also identified these as the key component of outdoor preschools, where encouraging children to take the lead when it came to their own learning, encouraging and facilitate children in this process were identified. While the practitioners interviewed during this research process had sound knowledge in relation to this topic, the purposive sampling method used within this research study and the small sample size means these findings cannot be generalised to the wider population.

5.3 To explore parental perspectives on why they choose an outdoor setting for their children.

When parents were asked about their reasons for choosing an outdoor preschool for their children's early years' education, health benefits emerged as the main theme. One respondent stated *"my child suffers from allergies, it was supposed to be better for them"* while another respondent found *"when I looked into it a bit more I found that children were less sick in the outdoor so we felt it would be a win-win situation"*. This was similar to the reasons practitioners gave as to the benefits on outdoor settings for children. This is backed up within literature by numerous researchers, including Kernan (2006) who found that children who engage in the outdoor environment, not only have improved appetites, sleep patterns but also a stronger tolerance to illness. Taylor et al. (2009) also identified the outdoors as having a positive effect on children diagnosed with ADHD. They found that the benefits of being in a natural environment were similar to that of two commonly used types of ADHD medication. Physical development also emerged as a theme among parents, as to, the benefits of these types of settings. This is similar to the findings of Athey (1990), Dowling (2010), Gill (2007) and Greenland (2006), who identified the outdoor environment as most ideal for children's physical development. This is vital as Cragg et al. (2006) identifies the importance of children engaging in physical activity at preschool age, as it encourages and builds the foundation for maintaining an active lifestyle throughout their lives. This is also supported by Pate et al. (1996) who highlights, the level of physical activity children engage in during their preschool years, as being the same throughout their teenage years. This again highlights the importance of ensuring children have adequate time in the outdoors. These findings were similar to the findings outlined under objective one: practitioner's views on the advantages and disadvantages, if any, an outdoor preschool has for children. Parents however failed to mention the cognitive benefits being in the outdoors has for children's development, the author observed that all the parents focused on the outdoor benefits on a child's health. Although the benefits for children's physical development emerged as a main theme within this topic it was mainly focused on by parents within the next section, with regard to risky play.

Overall, parents felt unsupported in accessing information in relation to outdoor preschools and voiced similar concerns to that of practitioner's views, of a lack of support from child

care agencies like, County Childcare Committees. Further research could be highly valuable in this area as currently, there is none, which was a deep cause of concern for the participants within this research project. The current study provides the viewpoints of both early year's practitioners as well as parents. If conducting this research again the author would employ a mixed method approach using both qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires. This could have provided for a richer source of data by including a larger population size. This would help ascertain, if the larger population associated with preschool settings in the outdoors felt the same way, as well as, obtaining the views of County Childcare Committees on this issue.

5.4 To investigate practitioners and parental views of risky play within an outdoor preschool environment.

Practitioners and parents were asked for their views on risky play, while practitioners provided an array of different types of risk taking activities, there was a lack of a clear definition of the term itself. Of the four parents interviewed two parents asking me to explain what was meant by risk before proceeding with the interview. This the author felt was an advantage to using the qualitative method, of semi structured interviews as it allowed for the clarification of questions by the researcher. This would not have been possible if the author had used a more interpretive approach, like questionnaires. All respondents seemed to understand why children should engage in this sort of play with one practitioner highlighting risky play as a vital component to children's development *"they need to push the boundaries of their abilities in order to enhance their development and learn new things"*. This view is supported within literature with researchers, like, Moyles, 2010; cited in Smidt, 2010; p 24, who states, that risky play allows children to learn about their skills and abilities. Gill (2007) also highlights the value risky play can have for building resilience and character, as well as, allowing children to learn about and understand risk. This can benefit them throughout their lives. Although parents agreed that children should and need to engage in risk taking activities they highlighted themselves as barriers to children doing this, with one parent stating *"I'm a terrible cautious person with my kids, I'm probably the worst person with risky play"*. Practitioners also identified parents as barriers to children's engagement in risky play activities, however they also identified their own

individual perceptions as a barrier also. This is supported within literature as Knight (2011) noted whilst conducting training with practitioners on this issue, some practitioners were hesitant to take the training on board and put it into practice within their childcare settings. Practitioners again highlighted the outdoor environment as most suitable for children's engagement in risky play activities with respondents viewing the "trees", "water", "hills" and "uneven surfaces" as reason for this. These views are also illustrated by Lee (1999), who found that the outdoor environment was the most effective for promoting challenging and dynamic play opportunities for children. While Sandseter et al. (2011) found that this was due to the fact that the outdoors provides natural surfaces, hills and trees which all contribute themselves to children's risky play. The author felt the positive nature in which risk was discussed within these interviews, may have unintentionally highlighted the value of risk taking for children and raised the awareness of its benefits, in particular among the parents interviewed enabling them to reflect on its value for their own children's development.

Practitioners were also asked to define risk and if they felt this type of play was supported within Aistear. As Sandseter et al. (2011) identified within their research people's perceptions of risk and risky play can be subjective. This was found within the current study by the practitioner's responses as to what risk was, with respondents opting to define risk in terms of physical examples like climbing or running. Magde et al. (2007) within their study also highlight risk as being hard to define. The majority of respondents felt risky play was supported within the Aistear curriculum, however, the author noted that, when probed further, practitioners struggled to identify how it was supported. Its child lead approach was understood by the majority of practitioners as the main way in which risky play was supported within Aistear. They felt this gave children the option to decide for themselves, within reason, whether or not to engage in risky play. It could be argued that there is a lack of awareness on this issue among this group of respondents. As such a small sample size was used within this study, this opinion cannot be generalised to the wider population of early childcare practitioners.

One respondent however raised an interesting point about the lack of clear definition on the term risk and risky play, which she felt left it up to practitioners to decide the level of risk available to children. She felt this could lead to children missing out based on practitioner's

personal views on the value of this sort of play. This is in spite of research carried out by Moss et al. (2002), who identify that children who are not allowed to engage in risky play, are losing out on the chance to develop important life lessons which could benefit them in later life. This is also supported by Guldberg (2009), who found that limiting access to risky play can have a negative impact on the developmental process of children. This respondent's view can be supported by the narrow definition of risky play within Aistear itself "children to explore the unknown" (NCCA, 2009; p. 53). This was an interesting aspect to arise from the interview with the respondent and could form an interesting basis for future research. The author noted again that of all the practitioners interviewed this respondent had the most experience within the childcare sector, which could form the understanding as to her advanced knowledge on this topic. This interviewee was the last to be interviewed, which meant that this issue could not be teased out further among the other participants to ascertain their views on it. The struggle, the majority of practitioners had in relation to how Aistear supports risky play leads the researcher to form the opinion that further research into this area would be invaluable, in particular, to ensuring all practitioners are taking the values of risk taking for children on board and openly educating parents on the topic. Another interesting observation the author made was the fact respondents did not see risk as a part of children's play, it was identified within this study as a part of learning for children. This is particularly interesting when one considers that practitioners are being led by Aistear which is a play based curriculum, which identifies risk in the term "*adventurous*" and "*explorative play*" (NCCA, 2009; p 54). Findings in this study found that practitioners and Aistear differ on this opinion.

5.5 Summary of Discussion

In summary, the first topic which emerged was the benefits being in the outdoors has on children's health, physical, creative and thinking development. The practitioners mentioned ways in which, this was evident including children's immune systems being better, children's thinking and creative skills having more of an opportunity to develop within the outdoors. These views were also similar to the reasons parents choose outdoor settings for their children and the value they felt these settings had for their children in particular, the benefits to children's health. Participants had clear views as to the ways in which Aistear and outdoor preschools related to one another and were very positive in relation to this

area. However practitioners were less clear as to the how Aistear related to children's engagement in risky play within an outdoor setting. The fact that Aistear is based on a child led approach appeared as the main reason, with practitioners feeling this meant children were free to choose, within reason, to engage in risky play if they wished. One participant disagreed citing a lack of a clear definition on risky play within Aistear as a concern, to the level of risky play activities individual practitioners were encouraging children to engage in. Practitioners and parents all voiced their concerns as to the lack of information on outdoor settings, with practitioners feeling unsupported and parents struggling to find information on outdoor settings and what it could contribute to their children's lives. The qualitative method used within this study allowed the author to collect in depth data for the participants, however the use of questionnaires could have enhanced the study by allowing for the collection of data from a larger number of participants including childcare organisations like County Childcare Committees.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to investigate and explore the role an outdoor preschool can play within a child's early year's education. In order to do this four aims and objectives were developed with a view to gaining the perceptions of both parents and practitioners. All practitioners highlighted the benefits to children's health and development of being in an outdoor preschool setting. These responses were similar to those of parents when asked why they choose an outdoor setting for their children. All respondents highlighted a lack of information on the topic of outdoor settings as a cause for concern. Practitioners had great knowledge on Aistear and how it related to outdoor settings, however, there was less understanding when it came to Aistear and risk taking. Both parents and practitioners understood the benefits of children engaging in risky play and cited many barriers to it including parents and personal perceptions. A qualitative approach was adopted in the form of semi structured interviews. Analysis of literature and findings uncovered many similarities. One major one being the value outdoor preschools have on children's health and development. Thus all government and voluntary bodies associated with the child care sector should recognise these benefits and provide adequate support and information on these settings for both practitioners and parents alike. More informed

research into the area of Aistear and risk taking were highlighted as an issue with confusion emerging within this study as to how they relate to one another. More informed information on this topic would help ensure all children are receiving the same opportunities to engage in this sort of play which previous research and this study found to be so important for their development. It is important again to highlight that this study only included the views of four parents and four practitioners. This small sample size reinforces the opinion of the author that these findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. Further research into this topic could include the views of a wider sample of parents and practitioners, as well as, childcare organisations like county childcare committees and children themselves who are at the heart of these settings and can offer a unique perspective as they are the main users of these services.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposal Form (Parents)



I would like to know if you would help me with a piece of work that I am doing as part of my Masters in Child and Youth Care course in Athlone Institute of Technology. The purpose of my study is to examine the benefits of an outdoor preschool experience for children in their early year's education.

If you wish to take part, I would like to interview you. The interview will last for no more than 45 minutes and will take place in your child's childcare setting at a time that would suit you. I will not ask about other things besides your views on outdoor preschool experiences and why you choose an outdoor preschool for your child.

I would like to tape the interview, however If you are not comfortable with this, I will take notes instead. You are free to stop the interview at any time for a break or altogether.

The things that you say in the interview will only be used for my report. I will give a summary of what was said by all the participants who took part in the study. I will not include your name or the names of your preschools. I might use one or two quotes from you however, your name will not be provided

If you agree to take part, please read the consent form below and sign your name. If you have any questions about the study, or if you would like additional information to help you in reaching a decision, please feel free to contact me Marion Donoghue at donoghuemarion@yahoo.ie (085) 7307266 or my faculty supervisor, Margaret O' Keefe at, mokeefe@ait.ie (090) 6468281.

Thank you in advance for your interest and support of this project.

Proposal Form (Practitioners)



My name is Marion Donoghue. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project as part of the requirement for my Masters in Child and Youth Care in Athlone Institute of Technology. This project will be conducted over the next several months and aims to explore the benefits of an outdoor preschool experience for children in their early years education.

This project is will require 45 minutes of your time. It will consist of an individual on-to-one interview during which I hope to explore your views on the role of an outdoor preschool experience for children in their early year's education.

I would like to tape the interview, however, if you are not comfortable with this, I can take notes instead. You will be free to stop the interview at any time for a break or altogether if you feel uncomfortable with any questions.

All questions will be relevant to the research topic and I will provide you with a copy of the interview questions before the interview. Everything discussed during the course of the interview will only be used within the research project. Your name and the name of the preschool setting will not be used. I will quote some things you have said but your name will not be provided. All audio recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and all notes and transcripts will be destroyed once the research project has been completed.

I hope you will consider participating in my research study. If you agree to take part, please read the consent form below and sign your name.

If you have any questions about the study, or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision, please feel free to contact me Marion Donoghue at donoghuemarion@yahoo.ie (085) 7307266 or my faculty supervisor, Margaret O' Keefe at, mokeefe@ait.ie (090) 6468281.

Sincerely,

Marion Donoghue

Appendix 2- Consent form (Parents)



I agree to take part in this project on the benefits of an outdoor preschool experience for children in their early years. I understand that my name and the name of the preschool will not appear in the report and the information I give will only be used for the study.

Full Signature_____ Date_____

Is it OK with you to have the session taped? Yes_____ No_____

Full Signature_____ Date_____

Consent form (Practitioners)



I have read the information letter concerning the research project about the role of an outdoor preschool experience for children in their early year's education. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive any additional details I wanted about the study.

I acknowledge that all information gathered on this project will be used for research purposes only and will be considered confidential. I am aware that permission may be withdrawn at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

I wish to participate in the research project: Yes _____ No _____

Full Name: _____ Date: _____

I agree to have the interview audio recorded: Yes _____ No _____

Full Name: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3- Interview Questions (Practitioners)

Benefits of an outdoor preschool for children in their early year's education

Objective one: Explore practitioner's views on the role, if any, of outdoor preschools for children

1. Why did you decide/choose to work in an outdoor preschool?
2. What do you think are the barriers to a childcare setting creating higher quality outdoor environments? (Time, cost, regulations, inspections)
3. What is your view on the future development of outdoor preschools within the early year's sector?
4. What, if any, supports are available to operators of an outdoor preschool? (HSE, County childcare committee)
5. What, advantages could outdoor preschool settings have on children's health and development?
6. What, advantages could outdoor preschool settings have on children's health and development?
7. In your view, which environment (indoor or outdoor) provides more opportunities for learning experiences for/with children? Why? (Limitations of each)
8. What do you hope the children will learn/take away from your settings program? (Based on the ethos of each setting). (Value for the outdoors, abilities, skills, confidence)
9. In your view/experience what does the learning look like within an outdoor setting? (Skills, knowledge etc.)
10. In your view, how does the learning in an outdoor setting compare to an indoor setting? Can you give examples?
11. What is your view, regarding the value of children's play in nature? Is it similar or different depending on the environment? Can you give examples? (Health, development, reconnection with nature, fosters a love of the outdoor for the future).
12. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share?

Objective two: Investigate practitioner's views on how outdoor preschools relate to the new Aistear curriculum

13. How does your outdoor setting relate to the new Aistear curriculum under its four themes?
-Identity and Belonging (Directing their own learning) –Communicating –Wellbeing (Judgement when it comes to risk, changing abilities) -Exploring and Thinking (exploring natural environment)
14. What is your setting's ethos? How does it relate to Aistear?
15. In accordance with Aistear what do you see, your role as a practitioner being, within your day-to-day interactions with the children in the outdoor setting? (Provide activities, let the children predict their own learning)
16. What are the goals of your setting? Where did they come from? Who made them? What are your views on them? How do they relate to Aistear? If so, in what way?

Objective Four: To explore practitioner's perceptions to risky play within an outdoor setting

17. As a practitioner what is your understanding of risky play?
18. What is your setting's view on children's engagement in risky play opportunities?
19. Why, in your view do children engage in risk-taking? What are the reasons? (Curiosity, intrinsically motivation, feelings of borderline activities, way of expressing themselves/learning, can be suffocated by adults, children might be influenced by adults)
20. Could you describe example(s) of risky activities that children might engage in within your setting?
21. What, if any, barriers or challenges do you feel there are to children's risky play opportunities with an outdoor setting? (Parental view, policy and procedures, personal opinions etc.)
22. What would help to increase the opportunities for risky play opportunities in preschool settings? (Do you think we need to change attitudes?) (resources, environment, personal views)
23. How does your setting engage with parents on the issue of risky play activities?
24. What teaching strategies do you, as an early years educator use to support children's risk-taking in the outdoors?

25. What are your views on Aistear and children's risky play activities? Do they support each other? If yes, in what way? If no, is this an area which needs further development?

Interview questions (Parents)

Benefits of an outdoor preschool for children in their early year's education

Objective three: Explore parental perspectives on why they choose an outdoor setting for their children

1. What factors shaped your decision to send your child to an outdoor setting?
(Prox. to home, value of outdoors)
2. Did you feel supported in terms of access to information on outdoor preschool education, when making your choose on what preschool to send your child to? If yes, where did you access information? If no, in your view, is this an area for future development?
3. What have you observed about your child's learning and skill development in the outdoor setting? (Fine motor skills, mental wellbeing, confidence, language development)
4. What insights, if any, would you offer to other parents considering sending their child to this type of setting?
5. Would you like to see this model of early years education developed in the future in Ireland?
6. What are your views on the outdoors play having had your child in this type of setting?
7. What, if any barriers or challenges would your child have to accessing the outdoors within your everyday environment? (i.e. time, lack of facilities, safety concerns)
8. What have you observed about how your child's responds to "bad" weather having attended this type of setting?
9. In your view, has the outdoor environment, influenced your child's play? If yes, in what way? If no, why do you think this is the case? (Connection with nature)
10. What are your views, on physical activity, having had your child in this type of setting?
11. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share?

Objective four: To explore perceptions to risky play within an outdoor setting

12. What are your views as a parent on children's access to risky play?
13. As a parent what is your understanding of risky play? How would you define it?
14. Why, in your view do children engage in risk-taking? What are the reasons?
(Curiosity, intrinsically motivation, feelings of borderline activities, way of expressing themselves/learning, can be suffocated by adults, children might be influences by adults)
15. In your view, what are the advantages/disadvantages, if any of children engaging in risky play?
16. Why, in your view do children engage in risky play?

Appendix 4- Glossary of terms

Outdoor preschools:	Outdoor preschool/forest schools refer to a setting where children spend the majority of their day in the outdoors usually up to 95% of the day.
Regular preschools:	Refers to conventional childcare settings.
Early year's practitioner/educator:	Refers to a person who is working directly with children from 0-6 years.
Aistear:	This is the name, meaning Journey, given to, the new early years curriculum framework for all children 0-6 years.