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New Directions in the Early Years: Introducing the Early Years Professional in England

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Introduction

- ❖ This paper reports on the ongoing doctoral studies into the introduction of a new professional identity in the early years in England
- ❖ There is a specific focus on the 2007-2009 cohort – 'The Pilot Phase'



Setting the Scene

- ❖ March 2006 the British Government introduced the:
Early Years Professional with Status (EYPS)
- ❖ This is only relevant to England
- ❖ The Early Years Professional (EYP) is being presented as the 'Gold Standard' in early years





- ❖ Every children centre in England should have an Early Years Professional by 2010 and every full time day-care setting by 2015
- ❖ The last four years has seen intense activity to develop frameworks to support the EYPS 'production line'
- ❖ There are now five routes leading to EYPS





Literature

- ❖ Policy Context
- ❖ Workforce Reform
- ❖ Professionals, Professionalism and Professional Identity in the 21st Century
- ❖ Professionalism in the Early Years





Research Aim

An exploration of the concept of professional identity through a critique of the concept, implementation and impact of EYPS as a new professional model





Methodology: 'The Pilot Phase'

- ❖ Feminist perspective
- ❖ Mixed methods methodology
- ❖ End of pilot
- ❖ Case study interviews (one year later)



Findings: Sample

- ❖ 62 candidates
- ❖ 54 awarded EYPS
- ❖ 30 respondents
- ❖ 5 case study interviews
- ❖ 91% were aged 30-59
- ❖ All female





They had some unique background characteristics:

- *87% worked in leadership, managerial and early years advisory roles.*
- *23% qualified teachers*
- *57% degree in Early Childhood Studies*



20% (6) had a post graduate qualification:

- *10% (3) post graduate teaching qualification*
- *10% (3) master's degree*



Findings: Impact on Candidate

73% EYPS had encouraged reflection on their practice

27% EYPS had motivated them to pursue further qualifications





Findings: Views Towards EYPS

- 74% Positive Step
- 64% Lead to more skilled workforce
- 43% Pay same as teachers
- 67% Never viewed the same as teachers



Findings: Views Towards Assessment Process

- 83% Preparation sessions were supportive
- 40% Found the needs assessment useful
- 60% The assessment process too prescribed
- 66% Appropriately rigorous





- 93% Welcomed the use of witnesses
- 77% Wanted professional dialogue
- 63% Mentor role was useful
- 93% Accredited continual professional development framework needed



Case Study Interviews

Provide insight into the emerging differences between the EYP and an early years teacher:

- *Knowledge and understanding of birth to three*
- *In-depth understanding about child development*
- *Working multi-professionally*





- *Greater participation in team working*
- *Wider partnership with the family*
- *Leading and supporting others in developing quality services*





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Discussion

Employment roles of participants did not reflect the government agenda of 'up skilling' the workforce

Early Years Advisors:

- *To effectively support others in the sector accessing EYP*
- *To contribute to the development of the new professional role*



Owners or managers of nurseries it was, as one candidate stated:

"...to protect my own nursery, as I could not afford to employ an EYP."



Long Term Stability

One participant stated:

"I feel strongly that the government will not achieve their aims...there is simply not enough money in the sector to attract good level 2 and 3 candidates in the numbers required. Investing in the top will not solve the very real problems faced by the day care managers when trying to provide quality experiences for children."



Experienced Workers

Concern about being 'overlooked'

Pay and Relationship with Teaching

Mixed and emotive feelings

"It is about time early years practitioners received professional and financial credit for the valuable work they do...which are the most important years to invest in."



Alternatively...

"I feel strongly that this qualification could divide education...an EYP does not have to show competence with managing a large group of children, they do not have to complete a probationary year and are not equivalent to QTS."



And...

"I know it is meant to be the same sort of level but I mean I spent four years obtaining my B Ed...if their [EYPS candidates] degree isn't childcare related I don't think they have the same sort of experiences as people who have QTS."





One Year On.....Case Study Interviews

"Early Years Professionals have a wealth of experience with the under threes, which teachers do not but they have expertise in learning and the curriculum, they complement each other."



Conclusions

This research project specifically provides base line data to evaluate the development of the EYP and support a richer understanding of the chronological evolution of a new profession imposed by the British Government.





- ❖ The data gathered from questionnaires and case study interviews has provided the opportunity to gain greater insight in to the early development of the EYP role
- ❖ The introduction has been problematic and challenging especially because of the alignment with teaching.



- ❖ The pilot group had distinct characteristics which meant for many, EYPS added nothing to their everyday professional roles
- ❖ The opportunity to reflect on their practice had been beneficial and had served to reinforce their knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence in their practice.



- ❖ This has been fuelled by research evidence, international perspectives, child death inquiries and the policy drivers of the Labour Party aimed at social inclusion and the eradication of poverty by 2020
- ❖ There is no quick fix



- ❖ It has also provided emerging data that provides insight about the differences between an EYP and an early years teacher supporting the need for both professional roles in the early years



**Any
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