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<http://ecr.sagepub.com>**Donald Simpson**

Teesside University, UK

Abstract

Across the 'European learning space' (Lawn, 2006) professionalisation of early years workforces has become a key priority and there has been a flow of this policy between borders (Oberhuemer, 2005). Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) is central to these developments in England. Within what is regarded as a traditionally 'split' early years workforce (Moss, 2008), EYPS felt to offer a route for those from a childcare background to improve their position relative to teaching professionals (HMT, 2004). Alongside these developments theoretical perspectives have emerged attempting to explain the professionalisation process in England. They include the following: 1) a post-structural theory suggesting the operation of an official discourse of professionalisation as a mode of control and regulation of EYPs' roles (Osgood, 2006); 2) an activist theory suggesting EYPs can take the lead in defining their own professionalisation and roles (Miller, 2008). Based on qualitative interview data, this article provides a typology which classifies EYPs as: role makers, role takers, role distancers or role avoiders. Then the potential of the post-structuralist and activist perspectives to explain how EYPs have come to play these roles is considered. It is claimed both these perspectives fall short in accounting for the complexity involved in the emergence of EYPs roles and a theory informed by critical realist insights is advocated as an alternative. The article concludes by casting doubt on the contributory potential of EYPS to facilitate change within the early years workforce.

Keywords

early years, early years workforce reform, England, professional status, professionalisation, role

Introduction

In recent years there have been unprecedented developments in early years education and care services in several countries across Europe. Until the last decade, in England early years services 'lacked any form of national financial support or policy direction' (Owen and Haynes, 2008: 9). But during the 1990s politically the early years gradually become a more prominent policy issue and the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (HMT, 2003) was released. Six months of consultation followed its publication before the further release of *Every Child Matters: Next*

Corresponding author:

Donald Simpson, School of Social Sciences and Law, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, Tees Valley TSI 3BA, UK

Email: donald.simpson@tees.ac.uk

Steps (DfES, 2004). The latter listed the response of central government to consultation. A 'key theme' of the Every Child Matters agenda was 'reform of the workforce' (Pugh, 2006: 9) through its professionalisation. The rationale for such a move was based on consultation and research evidence (Sylva et al., 2003).

Consequently, the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) was set up in 2005 and charged with the task of overseeing reforms for the entire children's workforce in England – including professionalisation in the early years sector. There was consideration of differing models of professional in the early years from some other countries. These included the 'Social Pedagogue' module from Denmark and a 'New Teacher' model from New Zealand. 'The UK government's response to the workforce consultation was to adopt a new role "Early Years Professional" [EYP] which is more akin to the "new teacher" than the pedagogue model' of professional (Miller, 2008: 23). Candidates attain Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) by successfully undergoing an assessment process developed via CWDC (2006). According to Murray (2009), initially there was a perception that EYPS had equivalence to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), but CWDC has indicated EYPS and QTS are based on different sets of skills and knowledge. Assessment for EYPS involves practitioners demonstrating that they meet 39 'standards' via one of four 'pathways'. The pathway followed depends on a practitioner's prior knowledge and experience. It is stated policy to have an EYP in every Children's Centre across England by 2010 and every full-day care setting by 2015

What is professionalisation?

The concepts of professionalism and professionalisation have become ubiquitous and are used in an increasing number of occupations and workplaces (Evetts, 2006). Definitions of the terms though remain contested. However, there is some agreement about how the two terms are distinctive. Professionalism concerns the dispositions and orientations of professional groups and individual professionals to their status and work. Professionalisation refers to the process of change that occurs before members of an occupation become professional and take a degree of control over the technical aspects of their work. Issues of professionalisation – and its study – have been to the fore in the schooling sector of English education (Barber, 2005; Hargreaves, 2003). But, it is only in the last decade – and in particular since CWDC introduced EYPS – that the presence of professionalisation in the English early years education and care sector has become more obvious (Brock, 2006).

The development of 'a more professional workforce' through recent reforms such as EYPS 'has been generally welcomed'. But it is recognized that this professionalisation is taking place within 'a regulatory framework' (Miller, 2008) and as will be noted there are critics of this process (Osgood, 2006). Early years professionalisation is though not unique in this respect. In its commitment to improving public services, the United Kingdom's central government defines an official discourse of professionalisation that is:

about a shared commitment between the government and public professionals to create world class performance right across the country. This represents a major strengthening of the government's approach to enabling high quality services. It means maintaining high standards of service and performance and strengthening user choices and voice, but at the same time providing space for the best professionals to manage and run their own services. (Cabinet Office, 2008: 33)

Professionalisation in the early years is not characterized by the 'licensed autonomy' of occupations such as medicine and law but rather is in a form described as 'mediative' (Malin, 2000). That is to

say, central government and CWDC mediate between EYPs and their clients (parents and children). Through the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the Department for Children, Schools and Families is central in managing the knowledge base and expertise which constitutes the basis of the new profession's activities. CWDC is the regulatory body charged with clarifying and ensuring entry standards for the emerging profession.

The process in the early years, then, is a good example of the new form of professionalisation being encouraged by government. It emphasizes increased state involvement, accountability and performance targets over an older form of professionalisation which is said to have been characterized by autonomy and collegial relations (Evetts, 2006). Through this form of professionalisation in the early years the government is attempting to improve the position of those working within the sector. It hopes to break down the hierarchical nature of the early childhood workforce – 'working with pre-school children should have as much status as a profession as teaching children in schools' (HMT, 2004). But fears about the government's involvement and its potential for reducing 'space' for professional autonomy have been raised. The following section considers this perspective in more detail.

Theorising early years professionalisation

Within the regulatory context described above two theories have emerged – the term theory is being used here to denote a way of describing and explaining the current professionalisation process in the early years. Both theories recognize professionalisation in the early years as 'mediated' by central government but differ in regard to the extent to which they claim the process will allow for EYPs space to be creative in constructing a role.

The first theory can be labelled a post-structuralist perspective because its main proponent Jayne Osgood (2006) draws heavily on the work of French post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault. Like all post-structuralists, Foucault was interested in language and its function and he believed that 'discursive formations' (that is ways of talking and thinking about an issue such as professionalisation in the early years) can become 'regimes of truth' which order knowledge and understandings of how things should be, therefore closing off other views and possibilities. These discourses exert power and eventually control over people, their beliefs and their practices. Foucault (1980) developed these ideas into a broader theory of 'governmentality' emphasizing the close relationship between the state and professions – with professions and professionals becoming the servants of more powerful governments.

Drawing heavily on Foucault's ideas, Osgood has speculated that through professionalisation EYPs will be heavily directed by statutory requirements and guidance within new frameworks such as the EYFS. According to Osgood (2006: 9) the professionalisation process in the early years is driving a reform agenda which is creating 'a situation whereby individuals increasingly judge and limit themselves to a normalised and conformist construction of professionalism'. Within the process whereby this normalization will be achieved, Osgood believes the subjectification of EYPs will be evident. She notes, for example, that 'like other professionals working in education, early years practitioners [including EYPs] are subjected to a disempowering, regulatory gaze in the name of higher standards' which is characterized by a 'technologising' discourse (Osgood, 2006: 5). Essentially, Osgood suggests that the government's official discourse of professionalism will be the pre-eminent determining factor in shaping how EYPs are positioned through the process of professionalisation which she labels 'social engineering'. She indicates that EYPs only chance of resisting the regulatory government discourse is to reposition themselves within another new or existing counter discourse.

The second theory offering an explanation for the professionalisation process in the early years is an 'activist perspective'. This is the name given to this theoretical position when it has been applied to explain teacher's professionalisation (Sachs, 2003). Activist theories in the wider social sciences have emphasized individual action/agency and juxtaposed it to wider social forms such as regulatory frameworks and discourses. An activist perspective though starts not with these social forms but rather with human action and there is recognition of the lead which professionals such as teachers can take in defining their roles. An activist theory accentuates a transformative contribution which professionals can make to their communities of practice and wider society (Sachs, 2003).

Linda Miller (2008) has framed an explanation pervaded by activist insights to explain professionalisation in the early years. She recognizes that early years professionalisation is a process unravelling in a 'regulatory framework' and, as such, questions whether 'standards and requirements' help or inhibit professional autonomy while creating a model of technical practice (Miller, 2008). Presenting a more optimistic account than the post-structuralist theory mentioned above, Miller's activist explanation claims the regulatory context in the early years is not closing off possibilities. Rather, Miller suggests that within this English context there remains the potential for EYPs to exert their agency through the professionalisation process. Consequently, practitioners 'need not be passive recipients of the reform process, but can be active in rising to the challenge by negotiating where they are 'positioned and defined' and thus take on the role of autonomous professional' (Miller, 2008: 25). Miller's activist theory suggests that EYPs will be centrally engaged in 'playing their role' and in their positioning as a professional.

However, both the theoretical perspectives above remain largely speculative because to date only limited research exploring the professionalisation process in the English early years context has been completed. For example, Miller produced her activist theory from a focus on only one individual practitioner. Another recent piece of research focused on the completion by EYPS candidates of their assessment and the impact of the latter on their professional identity (Goodliff, 2007). This research highlighted the importance of 'culture' as a shaping influence on the experience of practitioners undergoing the EYPS assessment process but it was also claimed practitioners took the opportunity for 'agentive experiences'. Findings from a survey of EYPs by The Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts (ASPECT) were used to make a political case for improving their conditions and rewards but not to critically reflect on the policy and draw implications for workforce reform (Willis, 2009). In this context, Brock (2006) has highlighted 'a need to listen to early years educators' voices to fill gaps in the perceptions of theorists'. Indeed, Mc Gillivray (2008: 252) has called for research investigating 'the views of practitioners themselves in order to explore the complexity of factors that contribute to professional identity in the early years'.

Research methodology

The research reported in this article aimed to identify what the process of professionalisation meant for a sample of eight EYPs interviewed. It was hoped to categorize via a typology the extent to which EYPs were matching (or not) the expectations about their professional role and identify factors contributing to the outcomes in this regard. The research design was therefore phenomenological because this strategy best allowed for the main research aim mentioned above to be achieved. A phenomenological approach interested in finding out the meaning of a given situation to the participants in research. Phenomenology guides one back from theoretical abstraction to the reality of lived experience (Moustakas, 1994) and the approach allowed the researcher to consider what the

professionalisation process meant for those he interviewed. Qualitative purposeful sampling was used. The researcher wanted to recruit EYPs having personal experience of the professionalisation process in the early years sector. All eight individuals worked in the northeast of England at the time of their interviews and were among the first group of practitioners to have EYPS conferred upon them. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with each of the participating EYPs twice – a first in the summer of 2007 and again in the spring/summer of 2008.

Data were analysed using theme analysis. Recent work considering role theory (Stryker, 2002) and the critical realist ideas of Archer (2001, 2003) offered conceptual insights in regard to the development of themes and interpretation of the data. Consequently, an emphasis was placed on exploring the motives and actions of EYPs. This is because Stryker's work identifies the dynamic aspect of working at roles and the interactions involved. Stryker highlighted how people can come to take the role of others or negotiate and actively construct their own role. He also recognized the importance of mapping micro-sociological concerns onto the same frame as macro-policy process and wider socio-cultural situations/influences. An explanation for how the micro and macro relate is central to Archer's (2003) critical realist perspective. Therefore, pervading the proposed research approach is an epistemological assertion that the development of EYPs roles is influenced by their reflexive deliberations. These mediate between their agency (their subjective professional projects and concerns) and the socio-cultural forms in which they are situated (Archer, 2003).

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Social Sciences and Law, Teesside University. The Statement of Ethical Practice issued by the British Sociological Association underpinned day-to-day conduct and ethical standards throughout the project. The utmost consideration was given to gaining the informed consent of all EYPs interviewed and to protecting their identity. All names of EYPs used within this article are pseudonyms.

Findings – a typology of EYP roles

A typology is a way of classifying social phenomena such as professional roles but it does not involve explanation of the latter. Rather, the typology produced through the analysis of interview data allowed for a classification of the extent to which each EYP was meeting (or not) expectations about role contained within the policy literature introducing EYPS. The acquisition of EYPS is not linked to any stipulations within a pay and conditions framework such as the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Framework. Also, gaining the status of EYP is not accompanied by and does not entail an obligation of contract with a set of duties and responsibilities to which they must comply. Rather, a number of broad expectations are attached to the gaining of the status. EYPs are expected to 1) be 'key change agents' in raising the quality of early years; 2) 'take responsibility for leading and managing play, care and learning' within their work setting; 3) fulfil the role of leading and supporting other staff by helping them to develop and improve their practice; and 4) be central to the successful introduction of the EYFS curriculum for nought–five-year-olds.

Therefore the typology of role which is reported below functioned as a heuristic device in the preliminary analysis of data. A heuristic device is simply a construct that is used by researchers to explore phenomena of interest – in this case the role of EYPs. A heuristic device in the form of a typology allows for the identification of the defining characteristics of a phenomenon. So in the typology below the key characteristics of the role playing of EYPs are captured in regard to how far they made the role expected of EYPs their own. These expectations then provided a useful defining benchmark around which differences were situated. In this way the

typology of professional role provided analytical clarity through classifying the actions of EYPS as role making (Andrea, Edna and Rosie), role taking (Rebecca), role distancing (Emma), or role avoiding (Angela, Katie and Katherine). The typology is discussed below with data from one EYP being utilized to represent each category of role. The section following then offers an explanation for variation across this typology and in doing so considers data from all eight interviewees.

Role making – Andrea

Role makers were those interviewees demonstrating relative success in negotiation and positioning connected to construction of their professional role. Andrea was the ‘Head of Nursery’ in an independent school and claimed she had ‘fought’ to have professional status introduced in the early years as she felt previously there ‘was no professional significance unless you have got PGCE’. Consequently, as part of her professional project she had been keen to acquire EYPS. On acquiring EYPS Andrea considered her circumstances and reflected upon the cultural context in which she operated. Andrea claimed that within the private school sector ‘professional status’ rather than qualifications were important in regard to securing better pay and conditions. Consequently, the acquiring of EYPS ‘opened up doors’. When conferred with EYPS Andrea was pro-active and sought a meeting with her headmaster. She negotiated a pay rise and better conditions with her management role being recognized – ‘I argued about a management role because of my workload and I said I have got professional status now.’

Andrea observed how in the private school culture in which she operated professional status rather than qualification was more important in regard to having discretion when pursuing role – ‘I had a degree which they recognized but they wouldn’t put me on a higher level pay because I didn’t have any professional status.’

Gaining the professional status in these circumstances meant Andrea was ‘trusted’ with greater responsibility. When interviewed she was responsible for ‘the day-to-day-running of this nursery, all policy, nursery training and nursery meetings, I deal solely with parents here no one else’. With her ‘deputy’ in the nursery she would ‘thrash out the daily routine, hours of working, and then we call in all the staff and we have a meeting’.

Role taking – Rebecca

Role takers were less successful in negotiations surrounding their professional projects and adopted roles largely conditioned by others. Rebecca worked as a ‘Nursery Nurse for several years before becoming a “Learning Support Assistant”’ in a primary school with a Children’s Centre attached to it. She had spent ‘the majority of her working life in nursery and reception’. Rebecca was encouraged to complete an Early Years Foundation Degree, Early Years Top-Up Degree and then EYPS by a head teacher who she felt ‘could see my potential’. But this head teacher had retired due to ill health. On acquiring her new professional status Rebecca nevertheless ‘expected’ to have a lead role within the school’s new Foundation Stage Unit.

But Rebecca claimed the new head teacher in her school did ‘not have affinity with the early years’. Unfortunately, Rebecca observed that some other influential teachers in the setting also had a ‘staid attitude’ and in her opinion operated as a ‘clique’:

I was always under the impression that there was going to be a role as such for the EYPS, but the teachers are teachers and they have still got their elitist attitude I’m afraid. Some of them [the teachers] saw me as a

professional on par with themselves others didn't. That's because they were older, and more closed minded, and they just didn't see there was a need for anything other than a nursery nurse or classroom assistant.

As such from the time when she obtained EYPS Rebecca had not played a prominent role in leading the early years work in her setting and had limited input into the planning for the delivery of EYFS. Rather two teachers were leading the Foundation Stage Unit's work at the school despite not having as much experience as Rebecca in early years and also not having EYPS. By the time of the second interview feeling undervalued and frustrated at having to take on a role largely prescribed by others Rebecca regretfully noted 'I have actually applied for voluntary redundancy now' and she felt 'gutted'.

Role distancing – Emma

One professional project was characterized by re-positioning which distanced this interviewee from working in the Foundation Stage. Like Rebecca mentioned above, Emma was a support worker in a school – a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) – when she obtained EYPS. But in contrast to Rebecca, Emma's wish to play a change agent role in regards to the early years work of the school was backed and supported by the head teacher. Consequently, while undergoing assessment for EYPS Emma was asked by the head teacher to 'co-ordinate play across the Foundation Stage' in the school. At this time she recalled being 'filled with enthusiasm'. Two reception teachers though were not so enthusiastic in regard to Emma's new role within the school. Emma noted how these teachers had less experience than herself in early years. After gaining EYPS Emma continued her co-ordinator role but it became 'difficult' according to Emma because the two reception teachers 'were paying lip service' to her suggestions and would 'ignore' her plans which were 'carefully put to one side'.

I think they deemed themselves very much as the class teachers and some of the things . . . that I was attempting to influence they felt that that was outside what I should be doing . . . When the Foundation Stage came in, in the first place, teachers were sort of . . . oh we can't do that . . . Because they were used to, in a reception class particularly, a much more formal approach and I had a greater deal of influence in my setting [after being asked to be co-ordinator] in implementing the ideas of the foundation stage, sort of loosening it up.

Emma described her professionalisation at this time as 'difficult' as in her own words she was faced with 'a sort of load of cotton wool, it wasn't a stone wall, it was more subtle'. This became very stressful for Emma and her enthusiasm for the role of co-ordinator waned – 'it sort of eroded your self-esteem after a while'. Eventually she said to the head teacher that 'this isn't working' and asked to be relieved of direct involvement in the early years work within the school. She worked mainly in Key Stage 1 but continued to have a support role for nursery nurses in the Foundation Stage and indirectly tried to influence the early years via this role.

Role avoiding – Katie

Despite gaining EYPS two of the interviewees had been active in striving to avoid a leading role with direct responsibility from the pre-school children in their respective settings. Katie was a HLTA in a primary school (with a School Nursery). She claimed that obtaining EYPS had personal but not professional implications for her. Katie felt personal satisfaction on obtaining the status but

observed 'it hasn't done anything for me'. She claimed this was because in the school setting in which she worked 'it has never been heard of'.

I think the only thing you get identified for in schools is HLTA and I don't feel that anything else – if you are not a teacher – I don't think anything else sort of matters. EYPS in the primary school it just hasn't gelled. And I know that I have got the piece of paper that says I have got it but if I didn't have the piece of paper my life hasn't changed because I have not got that piece of paper.

Katie claimed there had not been opportunities to develop her role as an EYP and on gaining the status it changed nothing in regard to her position in the school – she continued to be 'one of three nursery nurses' and the early years work in the school was led by a teacher. Katie claimed to have felt 'stuck because I had done all these years as a nursery nurse, I had reached the top of my salary scale and professionally there was nowhere else I could go. But to move to an HLTA let me progress a little bit further'. Consequently, Katie gained HLTA status and since then has moved out of the early years work within the school.

Findings – explaining EYPs roles

Data used to highlight the typology above support the activist perspective on professionalisation (Miller, 2008) in the sense that EYPs were active in the professionalisation process which they undertook. When conferred with EYPS all interviewees continued to embrace and pursue subjective professional projects. They attempted to define and negotiate courses of action as a way of expressing their professional ideas in their role. Following their successful assessment for EYPS all interviewees in the sample were 'attentive to creating possibilities' and assumed 'responsibility to choose, experiment, discuss, reflect and change' (Fortunati, 2006, cited in Moss, 2008). As part of this ongoing professionalisation process interviewees were involved in 'role playing' (Stryker, 2002). But the typology shows EYPs achieved relative success in making the role of change agent and leader within settings their own. Recognizing EYPs agency as bounded is key to understanding why. Their actions take place in circumstances that are potentially enabling and inhibiting in regard to their professional positioning. In particular, the data presented in the typology highlight the early years as a site of conflict and this is something Miller's (2008) activist theory underplays. Rebecca, for example, noted the 'struggle' she had with two teachers over her role and the antagonism this created. Indeed, this reflects research in Finland which referred to early years professionalism as 'a breeding ground for struggle' (Kanos, 2009: 224).

As noted the post-structuralist theory (Osgood, 2006) mentions 'resistance' and the potential for struggle in the early years. It also quite rightly implies that professionalisation will always be 'situated' (Oberhuemer, 2008) within social contexts. The data confirmed how the situations in which EYPs operated were highly influential in regard to conditioning their ability to be creative and undertake positioning. But the data from interviewees also raised questions about the privileging by post-structuralist theory of the government's 'technicist discourse' as an influence on EYPs' professionalisation. Common across the group of EYPs interviewed was a professional epistemology which cautioned against using the notion of hegemony to explain the construction of professional role. Emma, for example, mentioned in the cameos noted – 'I have never felt constrained by any of these policies.'

Rather, the typology highlights the greater influence of other discursive and social forms. For example, discourses about early years professionalism pervading the communities of practice within which EYPs operated. As the cameos testify, these discourses contained differing norms and

values. So, across contexts the value placed on EYPS was to have a shaping influence on EYPs' role playing. For example, within the context in which Andrea operated a high value was attached to EYPS and this influenced her role making in regard to professionalisation. The opposite was the case in regard to the context in which Katie a role avoider operated.

Local discourses and the perceived value of EYPS linked to an important aspect of workforce structure. On obtaining EYPS an interviewee's position in the traditionally 'split' (Moss, 2008) early years workforce as either a Teacher, Teaching Assistant or Nursery Officer/Nurse was significant in regard to how others viewed them and how successful they were in role playing. This 'split' workforce in England has been organized in a 'strongly hierarchical manner' based on levels of previous education and pay (Cameron et al., 2009). Discourses found within communities of practice about professional boundaries and expectation of – and suitability for – key roles reflected this hierarchy. This observation supported a finding emulating from recent evidence collected ahead of the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy (2008). The latter found that across the children's workforce professionals 'do not always work together' and there are 'concerns that professional colleagues' 'will not play a full role or do not have the skills or capacity to do so' (DCSF, 2008).

Suitability discourses were a legacy of a long-term 'split' workforce. They were also central to understanding why five EYPs in the sample were not playing the full role expected of them. Compare the problems encountered in trying to make a leadership role by Rebecca, Emma and Katie mentioned above in the typology with what Rosie, a Foundation Stage Teacher who also gained EYPS (but had QTS and was categorized as a role maker), had to say:

I wouldn't say there was any actual real difference for me as an EYP. It's just like being a qualified teacher, having that status is no different. I think it would be different if you weren't a qualified teacher and you achieved that status. I just think its um . . . the way people are with you within the early years, within the Foundation Stage there are teachers and the childcare practitioners always look up to you as the teacher. (Rosie)

Edna was another teacher who had then gone on to acquire EYPS and her role as change agent was demonstrated by her central influence in reorganizing provision in her setting around an EYFS unit which she led. She explained what gaining EYPS had meant for her and outlined the hierarchy she felt represented power relations in the early years:

as a teacher it [EYPS] gives you nothing, you don't get any more money, anymore power . . . I mean the power thing yeah, it was already there because you lead and manage. I lead and manage, but as a teacher you will always be the teacher first and the EYP will always be second. (Edna)

An interviewee's place in the split early years workforce was important in shaping the nature of opportunity structures available as part of the professionalisation process. This included the relative openness or closure of setting processes in regard to staffing, workload allocation and/or the presence or absence of influential facilitators. It also influenced opportunities beyond settings. Angela – a role avoider – acquired EYPS 'as a way of securing my post' in the context of 'a lot of re-structuring in the Sure Start Local Programme'. But she had become disillusioned because she felt 'local authorities see the [EYP] role as somebody in the day care that is working with children and they don't see it as strategic'. Angela observed how qualified teachers were being employed as developmental workers for the early years despite having no experience in pre-school. Consequently, she moved post to be a Centre Service Development Officer in a Children's Centre and completed

the National Professional Qualification Integrated Centre Leadership. This meant that her focus was on 'setting up' and 'managing' the new Children's Centre and 'establishing it as a business to be sustainable'.

ASPECT's survey mentioned earlier revealed how despite being determined to use their expertise to support settings EYPs are deeply worried about pay and conditions (Willis, 2009). The experiences of one EYP can be used to highlight how this lack of reward can condition the professionalisation process. Katherine was an outstanding early years practitioner and previously received a national award for her work. She also had a Masters degree but when interviewed she claimed to be 'treading water'. Katherine contacted the local authority in which she operated to try and 'raise awareness' of EYPS and have it recognized as a job in its own right. However, she was unsuccessful and frustrations about a lack of rewards resulted in Katherine questioning if she would continue to work in the Children's Centre where she was situated. With a mortgage and two children to support she noted that the point had come whereby she 'could not afford' to continue working within the early years. Indeed, Katherine eventually left the setting where she worked to take up a post at a university.

Conclusions

Professionalisation in the early years in England (and beyond) involves a process and emergence. As part of this process, the professional roles of the EYPs interviewed were not fixed and immutable but rather they were dynamic and open to ongoing shifting and re-positioning. The desire to generalize from a small qualitative study of this type needs to be resisted, but the development of the typology is valuable because it allows for a monitoring of the implementation of the policy creating EYPS. The classification of four different role types refutes a simplistic notion pervading this policy – namely, that by introducing a new status those acquiring it will automatically take on the role of 'change agent' with 'responsibility for, leading and managing play, care and learning' in their settings. As the typology of role demonstrates, only three had made a leadership role within a setting their own while five of the interviewees were not fulfilling this expectation. It is hoped the typology will be of interest and value to others investigating the role of EYPs and that in this way its empirical scope might be tested.

In explaining why the roles classified within the typology emerged, the research allows for an assessment of the post-structuralist (Osgood, 2006) and activist (Miller, 2008) theories outlined earlier. These theories have speculated about the process of professionalisation and offer a prediction in regard to what will be important in shaping the professional roles of EYPs. But both these perspectives fall short in regard to understanding the experiences of those interviewed in this study and the complexity of factors influencing how EYPs came to perform the roles identified in the typology.

The data in this study supported Miller's activist theory of early years professionalisation in so far as those interviewed were clearly active in this process. But as the data also highlighted, this activist theory understates the importance of antagonistic relations within the communities of practice to which EYPs belong. In particular, the activist theory fails to capture fully the extent to which these relations can be negative and characterized by conflict. Similarly, the data revealed limitations in Osgood's post-structuralist theory of professionalisation. It showed that the work of Osgood overstates the influence of the 'disempowering regulatory gaze' of central government and its 'technicist' discourse of professionalisation. Discourses as ways of talking and thinking about the roles of EYPs were important in conditioning the lived reality of interviewees and their

professionalisation. But the most influential discourses were those within the relations that EYPs formed with colleagues when participating in communities of practice.

The activist and post-structuralist theories also fell short in helping to understand how agency and wider social forms interact in the positioning of EYPs. To date, the activist theory of Miller is incomplete in this regard. She recognizes the potential importance of 'internal perspectives' which EYPs will hold and how they will also form 'perceptions of external perspectives'. But she offers only 'a glimpse' of these rather than fully considering their connection. Alternatively, Osgood's post-structuralist theory does provide an explanation for how EYPs interact with their external environments. But it is an unconvincing conflation of what she terms 'deterministic structural arguments' and 'agency' – the EYP's self (Osgood, 2006). How structural factors can be 'deterministic' and offer 'the self' room for positioning is not at all clear. Rather in this post-structuralist model of professionalisation EYPs are portrayed as so inextricably intertwined within discourses it seems inappropriate to talk of the EYPs 'self'. Indeed, Osgood talks of the potential for discourses to make EYPs and other practitioners 'docile bodies'.

But those interviewed for this research were certainly not cultural dupes unable to step outside of 'society's conversation'. Therefore, in understanding the process of professionalisation it is important not to conflate EYPs as agents with aspects of their circumstances as the post-structuralist theory of Osgood does. The data from those interviewed emphasized the importance of keeping separate social forms and EYPs agency. EYPs do have 'internal perspectives' and their agency is more sophisticated than the activist and post-structuralist explanations allow for to date. Social forms (such as wider discourses) and EYPs agency are mediated by EYPs reflexivity. That is to say, they think about and are involved in rationalizing experiences and future actions over time. In this way EYPs are not 'docile', but rather they are active in attempting to negotiate their professionalisation and they respond reflexively to circumstances in pursuit of goals attached to subjective professional projects.

But this does not mean they can reflexively adopt the role they value most. Rather, in considering the best courses of action and in addressing their concerns EYPs always consider the circumstances in which they operate. When pursuing the goals attached to their subjective professional projects EYPs' values and concerns entered into a relationship of harmony or conflict with wider socio-cultural forms. It was then that social forms became enabling or inhibiting in regard to the pursuit of these projects. As the data used within the typology revealed, some circumstances were more conducive to EYPs being creative in regard to making a role for themselves. But others experienced situations where suitability discourses and the absence of influential allies was inhibiting.

These findings reveal the everyday experiences and lived reality of EYPs within a context where attempts to professionalize the early years are appearing without significant 'underlying re-structuring of the workforce' (Cameron et al., 2009: 1). Propelled by central government, the introduction of EYPS in theory allows those from a childcare background within the split early years workforce to improve their status and position (HMT, 2004). But the explanation for the varied roles found in the typology suggests that a hierarchical workforce remains evident. There had not been a significant change in the power dynamics, membership and values of the communities of practice to which the EYPs belonged. Consequently, the findings cast doubt on the potential of EYPS and those achieving the status to facilitate change within the early years workforce. They reveal how previous inequalities of condition and opportunity across the workforce may be perpetuated – especially where those acquiring the status work alongside qualified teachers.

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Biographical note

Donald Simpson is a Senior Lecturer in Education contributing to early years programmes. His research interests include a focus upon reforms to the children's workforce.