

Please cite the Published Version

Barron, Ian (2016) Flight turbulence: the stormy professional trajectory of trainee early years teachers in England. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24 (3). pp. 325-341. ISSN 1469-8463

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2016.1204906>

Publisher: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis

Version: Accepted Version

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Flight turbulence: the stormy professional trajectory of trainee early years' teachers in England.

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Abstract

This paper documents trainees' 'flight turbulence' as they negotiate the complexities that lie between 'the self' and the securing of Early Years Teaching Status (EYTS) in England. Early Years Teachers, besides teaching, are expected to lead improvements to the quality of provision. However, drawing on interview data, an impasse is discerned where ideas meet instrumental policy in practice. Trainees are often unable to reshape the meeting of theory, policy and practice and struggle in finding teaching approaches which they are comfortable with ethically. Drawing on Holland et al's concept of 'figured worlds', it is suggested that the development of theory-informed practice should not be seen as a solitary task for the student but as a dialogic though difficult conversation involving the student, university staff and placement practitioners. Dialogism is seen as requiring persistence but as offering opportunities for beginning early years' teachers, with support from teacher educators and experienced practitioners, to negotiate the challenging spaces between policy, theory and beliefs as they seek to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct ethical professional identities for themselves.

Key Words

Early years initial teacher training; figured worlds; space of authoring; critical realism; persistence

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the professional formation of university-based Early Years Teacher Trainees in England. Before considering the specific case of England, consideration is given to the broader international context of early childhood professionalism, particularly over the last twenty years. Attention then turns to a small-scale study of undergraduate and postgraduate trainees at two universities in the north of England, both of which have been involved in educating and training early childhood professionals over many years. A critical realist (Bhaskar 2011) methodological stance is outlined which underpinned the way in which

the data were collected, with a small number of trainees from each institution being interviewed three times over the course of a year. The paper goes on to explore the findings from the interviews, which are analysed using a critical realist framework. The final part of the paper seeks to theorise the struggles between academic and professional identities as the trainees seek to make sense of theory, policy, practice and the professional standards, drawing upon figured worlds (Holland et al 1998) and Foucault's (2002) insights into discourses and the operation of power.

International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Provision

In terms of early childhood professionalism, Banković (2014, 254) notes that 'globally, ECEC practitioners struggle with a range of vague and ambiguous titles'. As we will see, this is certainly the case in England. In most parts of the world, in the past twenty years, there has been a rapid professionalization of the workforce. This reflects, as Petersen et al (2016) highlight, national government attention to ensuring 'the best possible start' as significant to later educational success and ultimately to enable individuals to contribute to economic prosperity, reflecting the position of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2012). Oberhuemer (2015) thus makes the significant point that 'what counts as professional knowledge and professional action is a matter of interpretation, depending on the particular discourse and cultural framework used to characterise and evaluate these concepts' (304). Increasingly, across the world, what is valued is provision considered effective in securing this economic prosperity.

Level and duration of training, status and pay and conditions for early childhood professionals vary considerably internationally. In a few countries, such as Pakistan (Zada 2014), little progress has been made with professionalization of the workforce, reflecting their particular current contexts. However, in a growing number of countries in Europe (Peterson et al 2016), Australia (Skattebol et al 2016) and New Zealand (Dalli 2008), entry and exit qualifications and length of training have become similar to those of primary and secondary school teachers. Graduates also increasingly lead practice (though with many other staff still holding post-secondary vocational qualifications). Urban et al (2012) highlight that integration of education and care tends to create the most effective provision since it aligns most closely with the lives of very young children. However, except in the

Nordic countries and some others, such as New Zealand (Dalli 2008), nurturing and caring are often seen to be lower level, ‘natural’ activities, resulting in lower financial rewards, as Van Laere et al (2012) note. This is particularly the case in countries where early childhood provision is mostly privately or regionally provided, such as England (Roberts-Holmes 2013; Wild et al 2015), Italy (Lazzari et al 2015), Serbia (Banković 2014), North America (Harwood et al 2013), Japan (Hegde 2014) and Singapore (Ang 2014), where there are also often distinctions between ‘care’, for children under three, and ‘education’, for those over three (see Lillvist et al 2014). However, as Karila (2012), Campbell-Barr and Nygård (2014) and Gunnarsdottir (2014) note, even in Scandinavia, there are current challenges from neoliberalism’s instrumentalist concern with early childhood provision as economic investment and emphasis on the market, supply and demand and ready measures of academic and economic success.

Early Childhood Professionalism in England

As Lloyd and Hallet (2010) point out, until recently, provision for children below statutory school age in England has been patchy and disparate. The past twenty years, however, have been marked by a reshaping of provision by neo-liberal government agendas. As Osgood (2009, 2010) and Simpson et al (2014) note, the UK New Labour government from 1997 paid more sustained attention than ever before to families and to early years’ care and education. A renewed perceived economic need for women to be workforce participants, became enmeshed with discourses about employment as a means of addressing child poverty and with ‘findings’ from neuroscience (see, for example, Shonkoff and Phillips 2000) about the life-long consequences of the first three years. The UK Conservative-Liberal administration from 2010 provided universal services for children from the age of three but provision for children under three increasingly became targeted as intervention for children considered vulnerable to poor early experiences (see, for example, All Party Parliamentary Committee for Conception to Age 2 – The First 1001 Days 2015).

Against this backdrop, recent years in England have seen the government creation of an entirely new early years’ professional group, originally known as *Early Years Professionals* (EYPs), regulated by a set of centrally determined professional standards. Its creation was the response of the UK New Labour administration to findings from Sylva et al (2004), which highlighted a correlation between teacher-involvement in settings and setting

quality, which in turn was seen as resulting in better outcomes for children. EYPs, whilst not teachers, held a professional status initially described as equivalent and were graduates. They worked with children from birth to five in children's centres and in non-state maintained early years' settings. This response reflected, as much as anything else, the government's commitment to a market approach to early childhood provision and a recognition that many of these settings were private businesses whose viability and profits would be threatened by the costs of teachers' pay and conditions. EYPs were charged with improving the quality of early years' provision in order to improve early and later educational outcomes for children, with a view to enabling the most disadvantaged to escape deprivation and also to ensuring that England had a well-educated, economically competitive, future workforce.

In 2013, the UK Coalition Government (DfE 2013) responded to the recommendations of Nutbrown's independent report (Department for Education, DfE 2012) on the early years' workforce by recognising the contribution that this new professional role had made but also that it had not always been well understood. Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) was replaced with Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) from September 2013. Early Years Teachers now work across the maintained as well as private, voluntary and independent sectors, though they still lack the pay and conditions of those with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and cannot be paid as qualified teachers in the majority of maintained settings, which, (as Nutbrown 2013, has argued) continues to affect their professional status. The notion of a new and distinctive profession has rapidly disappeared and Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) is now inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) alongside primary and secondary training, using very similar criteria.

In terms of the meanings attached to professionalism, Simpson (2010, 6) argues that there are two distinct constructions. The first, he notes, sees 'professionalism as largely socially constructed and determined'; the second sees professionals 'as more active and reflexive agents in constructing their professionalism'. Hordern (2013,108) highlights the former, pointing to 'the central role of government and agencies in specifying the content of programmes of initial professional development, induction standards and processes of continuing professional development and career progression, shaping notions of competence'. Hammond et al (2015, 143) note how

when expectations are enforced through statute, teaching practices can be audited for consistency, effectiveness and curriculum fidelity. Likewise,

data on children's progress can be monitored to ensure every child's right to succeed This assumes that student teachers will subscribe to the notions of education advocated by those in power, accepting the technicist role

A significant longitudinal study carried out on behalf of the Department for Education by the University of Wolverhampton (Hadfield et al 2012) explored the professional identities of these new EYPs. The study distinguished between existing practitioners and new entrants from the one-year postgraduate training route, referred to as 'novices'. The study did not consider a smaller number of undergraduate 'novice' EYPs taking part in a pilot project at four universities in England, including the two from this study. This undergraduate pathway is now offered by all training providers. A number of small-scale studies have also explored the professional formation of early years graduate leaders but, to date, these have largely concentrated on experienced practitioners (Simpson 2010; Lloyd and Hallet 2010; McDowall Clark 2012; Roberts-Holmes 2012). A study by Hevey (2010) did identify differences in professional confidence between experienced graduate practitioners and those who were working towards their status via the one-year postgraduate training route. The novice trainee EYPs were more likely to understand their professionalism in managerial/technicist terms. More experienced EYPs were more concerned with evaluating and improving practice, relationships with children and other practitioners, and with empowering others. They were also more likely to question directives and challenge practice. We will return later to these matters, as such questioning emerged from some trainees on the one-year postgraduate route in the present study.

Theoretical Considerations

The paper now considers how identity is conceptualised. Identities are understood not in terms of essence and fixity but as being '... the result of negotiations, reversals, exchanges, rejections, adoptions, dismissals and renegotiations as we claim, abandon, and rework the ways of being that are available to us as we find ourselves in different situations and interacting with different people over time' (Compton-Lilly 2008, 23). Whilst there is recognition of the ways in which identities are constructed under conditions of power (Foucault 2002), , consideration is also given, following Dagenais et al (2006, 208), to identities as 'not entirely determined by social forces' with space to be 'refigured by individual actors'. The work of Holland et al (1998) on 'figured worlds' is considered to be

particularly helpful in seeking to theorise the space of agency within professional identity, as individuals respond to the socio-cultural worlds that they encounter and in which they engage.

Holland et al (1998) use a number of inter-related concepts in order to theorise identity. The first concerns ‘figured worlds’ as places where, they argue, identity is constructed and meaning negotiated. The second concerns the dependence of identity on positionality, understood as one’s place in the world as determined by social divisions such as gender, class and ethnicity. The third is that individuals come into contact with, and respond to, the discourses and practices to which they are exposed in a space of authoring, which leads to the emergence of identity. Figured worlds exist before we are invited to enter them and in so doing we participate in their histories, belief systems and ways of being, drawing upon existing artefacts and discourses in our performances. Gee suggests (2011) that, in order to understand which figured worlds are at play, we need to consider what deeply held conscious and unconscious beliefs must be in operation for people to act as they do. Again, we will return later to these matters. There is a sense here of the way in which, in Foucault’s terms (2002), figured worlds are part of the mechanisms by which power is exercised and discipline imposed. In Holland’s terms, however, this is also a place where we experience agency, as not only do we participate in, improvise and respond to figured worlds, we also bring about change in them and reinterpret ourselves in the process.

Through our participation, the activities of figured worlds confer upon us identities and we look at the world from the positions that we habitually inhabit. Following Bakhtin (1982), figurative identities involve bricolage, making use of existing tools and resources that both curtail and open up possibilities. The early childhood world of practitioners could be conceived of as a figured world, made up of beliefs about the educational needs of children that are often heavily influenced by romantic notions of childhood innocence, natural growth, developmental psychology and its notions of stages of development and learning through activity. Figurative identities are created from our responses to the experiences, tools and resources provided to us by others and by the responses of others to our engagement with them. The dialogic self thus authors the self and the world in its response to the world’s inheritance and experiences. Where the dialogic-self acquiesces, it reproduces the figured world; where it challenges, it has the potential to transform. Figurative identities exist alongside positional identities, however, and social position and social divisions are hugely influential. Following Bakhtin (1982) and Vygotsky (1978), subject positions are not wholly

freely chosen but are improvised from the cultural resources which history makes available. Identities are thus conceived of as dialogic contested spaces of authoring rather than as singular and integrated ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us.

Methodological Considerations

Methodologically, the research process and the nature of what emerges from it are also conceptualised as contested. The stance taken is a critical realist one, following Bhaskar (2011), where ontological reality is unchanging (intransitive), whilst epistemological knowledge is always in flux (transitive). Critical realism conceptualises the world and its meanings as stratified. The layer that we readily perceive, ‘the empirical’, is a world of effects, which, Bhaskar (1998) claims, provide evidence of external causality, independent of human perceptions of it, in the world of ‘the real’. This is a world of enduring generative forces, mechanisms and tendencies (that could be understood in other terms as discourses) which generally combine to produce effects. He also argues that there is a world of ‘the actual’ where the effects of generative mechanisms and causal tendencies/discourses may or may not be played out and may or may not be seen. The relationship between effects and causes, between the empirical, the actual and the real is thus multidimensional with several causal tendencies/discourses usually behind any effect. By seeking to record carefully what we see in the world of the empirical and in seeking to identify all the possible happenings and events in the world of the actual, Bhaskar (1998) argues that we have the basis for seeking to understand the underlying causal tendencies/discourses that might explain them. This becomes important in considering the factors at play in early childhood practice and the ways in which trainee early childhood professionals respond. It also means that whilst the study was small in scale, and so care needs to be taken not to overstate the significance of the conclusions that can be drawn from it, the critical realist methodological framework provides some basis for considering whether such generative mechanisms may be operating in EYITT in England beyond the providers studied here.

The small-scale qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews with 16 trainees from two universities in England. A further paper, still in preparation, specifically examines the interviews with the postgraduate students only and so not all of the data are drawn upon here. Of these, eight were undertaking their training at each institution, with four on the undergraduate and four on the postgraduate routes. In selecting trainees from the postgraduate pathway, in order that we could explore the possible significance of previous qualifications and experience, we sought to include: some with Early Childhood Studies

degrees; some with degrees with a similar disciplinary base (e.g. psychology, sociology); and some with less explicitly related degrees. Each student was interviewed three times: at the beginning, mid-point and as they were approaching the end of their training. The intention was that the same member of staff would interview the same student each time but two of the staff left before the end of the training course at one of the institutions and so two other members of staff carried out the final interview for two of the trainees. The interviews were carried out at the two universities and were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The research team from the two universities met regularly both throughout the year in which the interviews were carried out and also during the subsequent year, when we discussed the interview transcript and shared emerging analyses.

Interview Findings

We turn now to consideration of the interview evidence (Bhaskar's 'effects'). The interviews were analysed initially in terms of identifying the similarities and differences between what the trainees said. This was done by careful reading across the transcripts and identification of 'effects' or occurrences that appeared more and less frequently, leading to the identification of themes. Consideration was given to similarity and difference in the themes that emerged respectively between undergraduates and postgraduates in the same and the other institution, and also to what similarities and differences seemed to exist between the undergraduates and postgraduates in the same and other institution. In line with the critical realist stance of the study, the concern was then to identify the causal tendencies/discourses from the world of the real (whether played out in the world of the empirical or unactivated in the world of the actual) that might explain the lived experiences of the trainee Early Years Teachers.

Where they had a degree that was concerned with the study of children and young people, almost all commented that this theoretical underpinning, particularly child development, was extremely important in making progress towards the Early Years Teacher Standards, in making sense of their practical experience and in terms of their sense of themselves as trainee Early Years Teachers

it is completely vital for children that we have a deep knowledge and understanding of how they learn and how they develop (University 1 Postgraduate KW).

I think my previous degree helped me quite a lotwhen we started talking about development and things like that it is kind of being repeated for me, albeit from a different angle and I've just had to look at it in a different light which I think has given me a bit of an advantage (University 2 Postgraduate JO)

Houston (2010) identifies particular groups of generative mechanisms, which, he contends, shape lived experience. One of these is the domain of the person, which is concerned with psychological, linguistic and cognitive forces and mechanisms and this seems to be a very significant influence on what trainees see as important in their work with children.

Whilst mindful of the dangers of falling into easy binaries, there did appear to be some differences between the responses of undergraduate and postgraduate trainees and some evidence of differences between the two institutions. Undergraduate trainees tended to see the relationship between theory and practice as being rather more straightforward than postgraduates. Undergraduates commented that practice was where they were expected to enact the theories they had learnt about and believed in and that experience helped them to understand the theory:

we get given theories and everything, then it's putting back into practice
Like I believe in .. you know Bowlby's attachment theory... I believe in love and affection, and sympathy and empathy and stuff .. (University 1 Undergraduate NA)

Some also saw theory as in some way establishing the 'truth' about good practice

once I've got the knowledge by my degree, I'm able to assess that in placement and then if anything does need ... altering, then I can do it (University 1 Undergraduate BL)

and/or practice as being the source of truth about theory

I'm constantly learning about all these different theorists ... and then when I go into placement I can see how they work and ... how they're right or how they're wrong (University 1 Undergraduate BL)

we have theories that treat every single child the same but when you're actually in placement you realise how different children actually are ... it's questioning

what you get taught.... and trying to fix it while you're in practice. (University 1 Undergraduate NA)

Thus, for undergraduate trainees, there was a tendency to view the connection between theory and practice as being about testing one against the other, about seeing whether the theories they had learnt about were borne out in practice and, if they were convinced by the theories, about determining whether practice needed to change where it was not consistent with the theory.

Where postgraduate trainees did not have existing Early Childhood Studies degrees, they seemed to view the connection between theory and practice in similar ways to the undergraduates and embraced the challenge where they felt it existed:

....so like learning about attachment theory and cortisol levels in the brain and how like stress can affect you throughout your life, it's just really interesting stuff (University 2 Postgraduate DH).

I kind of really pay attention as to how he developed and things like that and just thinking, maybe the research is right maybe it's telling something that's true (University 2 Postgraduate WC)

Where postgraduate trainees did have Early Childhood Studies degrees, they tended to suggest that the status of child development knowledge was important but also should be subject to critique

the degree it has made me quite open minded and criticise everything and take everything apart ... if you categorise that child straightaway without looking at all the other options then you could be ... pathologising that child (University 1 Postgraduate KJ)

everything for me is like political and I'm learning about child development again obviously I'll still be critiquing (University 1 Postgraduate KW)

Along with finding child development theory to be important to their formation as Early Years Teachers, most undergraduate trainees appeared to see the Standards as helpful:

The Standards... obviously they're quite hard to understand to start off with, but ... I've understood em now, you're trying to make sure that you're doing, what, you're trying to meet every one, which makes me as a professional better cos I'm constantly thinking have I done this, have I done that ... (University 1 Undergraduate BL)

because of the kind of content of Early Years Teacher Status being as specific as it is it's kind of brought to life...I can kind of tell what's good practice and what's bad practice ... (University 2 Undergraduate HB)

In these cases, it is helpful again to consider the types of mechanisms that Houston (2010) identifies and how these might shape beliefs and experiences. The most powerful are the domains/discourses of the economy and of culture, which dominate all others. The domain of the economy determines the value of ways of being and the domain of culture shapes the forms of understanding that are valued. The undergraduates appear to be particularly strongly influenced by the domains of the economy and culture and effective practice seems to be determined by its perceived effectiveness in helping children to become skilled and self-sustaining future members of society. The postgraduates, however, seem more aware of and more uncomfortable with the operation of these mechanisms of power through professional standards and the auditing arrangements of the state's regulatory and inspection apparatus.

The way in which the curriculum was understood in settings was another area where there were differences between undergraduate and postgraduate trainees. Some undergraduate trainees seemed strongly influenced by the domain of culture and untroubled by its discourse about school readiness (as preparation for narrowly measured future educational success) which has become increasingly attached to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE 2014) since 2010.

they are like blobs of play dough (I know that's weird). We (EYs) mould them into these humans who then have to go into school show them how to sit on a chair and listen to the teacher But also how to feel confident in themselves, to want to learn, have this desire to learn (University 1 Undergraduate J)

At times, however, this sat awkwardly alongside other beliefs, influenced by the domain of the person and other figured worlds, and there was a concern to help children to discover who they are:

Well I think ... you're finding the individual in the child, letting them find out who they are, how to make relationships, how to just go about every day to day life really (University 2 Undergraduate LB).

To know each child individually and to know what's best for them is really important (University 2 Undergraduate HB)

I do think it's important that when working with kids that you do listen ... rather than tell them what they want because it's dangerous to end up in that area when you start telling kids how it's gonna be, 'cos they all have their own opinions and they know what they are. (University 2 Postgraduate JO)

On the whole, both undergraduate and postgraduate trainees explained that they believed learning was more effective for children when starting with their interests. Not being able to do so as much as they believed they should appeared to be the major source of discomfort for all trainees at both universities:

I don't want them ever to do anything they don't enjoy ... I always want them to do something they enjoy. So any task, anything like that I don't want to be something they don't like (University 1 Undergraduate BL)

looking at the children, like the unique child and everyone is different, having their own individual interests, is something that isn't necessarily done... (University 2 Postgraduate JO)

The trainees generally emphasised that they saw children as individuals in the process of becoming. This, perhaps, reflects understandings about young children taken from the figured world of child-centred education and the dominant narratives of developmental psychology (which Houston 2010, conceptualises as part of the domain of the person) that underpin so much early childhood work. It was noticeable that many of the trainees emphasized the importance of critiquing dominant discourses but none of them appeared to

recognise that notions about following children's interests are also constructs reflecting cultural, temporal and geographic locations and the dominance of Western child-centred individualism. Thus, they did not consider other ways of understanding children, childhood and the contexts in which they occur. These conflicts are particularly evident in the interviews with postgraduate trainees at university 1 where they argue:

Children need to have the opportunity to be the person that they can be and hopefully our role allows that because we will be knowledgeable enough not to fit them into one place and let them explore their learning in different ways (University 1 Postgraduate KW)

I want to be.. responsive, enabling children to learn as opposed to making them learn I see children as individuals and that I have to nurture their individuality and not squash it (University 1 Postgraduate MA)

There was a strong sense from the trainees, however, that the EYFS, a manifestation of the domains of the economy and culture and part of the figured world of regulated early childhood practice, was used too readily as a tool against which settings assessed children's learning and development. Some trainees were troubled by this, believing that it led to deficit notions about children:

with the EYFS I'm always like .. gotta look for that, look for this – it's not focusing on what they're really good at and I find that frustratingI try to incorporate that ... but sometimes it's like we can't do that so we've got to keep doing that and they might not actually enjoy it and so that's why they're not doing it ... they've got to have pictures in their files, photos in their files, they've got to have two observations a week at least ... and that sort of pressure is just overwhelming.... I started off really enjoying it but now – I love the children but I don't like the job, I really don't (University 1 Postgraduate KJ)

There was a concern that too much time is spent measuring children's progress against predetermined goals:

I caught myself comparing a child to a check list and I really hated myself for it ... I am constantly thinking about next steps andI don't want to get to the point literally where I don't see a child there and I just see a list they need to meet – that's been tough to manage .. I don't want to be that person but it's kind of what the job makes Development Matters is a guidance but we all use it as ideas to meet learning goals – every child is an individual yet we have criteria we must conform them to (University 1 Postgraduate KW)

Postgraduate trainees at University 1 felt that the Early Years Teacher Standards suggested that notions about children, their development and effective practice could be readily identified and they experienced this as being at odds with how they understood children and early childhood practice:

I'm having difficulty reconciling my ideals and beliefs with reality and the constraints' (University 1 Postgraduate MA)

instead of doing all the stuff that's initiated by the children ... you're just trying to find stuff to do to meet that and trying to do it as if it is stuff they want to do but it is like meeting the standards at the same time but it is like quite difficult. (University 1 Postgraduate KJ)

I have to conform to a certain extent ... I have to meet the Standards Standards are everything you have to look at this and that and why are they are there. Everything for me is like political ... (University 1 Postgraduate KW)

The trainees thus appear to be troubled by the dominance of the domains of the economy and culture and the figured world of regulated and governed early childhood practice, especially where these bump against other perspectives that they value in relation to the education and lives of young children drawn from the domain of the person. This is a similar tension to that highlighted by Wild et al (2015) in their analysis of the differences between the discourses used in two policy-related documents in England, *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) and *The Nutbrown Review: Foundations for Quality* (DfE 2012) where they contend that 'one tends towards prescriptive practice and outcome and the other towards teaching and learning as a creative and developmental process' (239).

At the beginning of the year, the postgraduate trainees at University 1 with Early Childhood Studies degrees were attracted by a perception that there was more flexibility in being a teacher in the EYFS rather than in Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2.

There's something about the creative freedom. It's not entirely freedom of course but you get a little bit of creativity with the children, a little bit more freeway, and a bit different engagement in how they learn ... (University 1 Postgraduate KW)

They come to feel, however, that working more creatively is rather more difficult than they had initially imagined. MA comments that 'what I'm seeing in practice is very different a lot of the

time to the theory' and KJ highlights that working with new ideas is challenging both for them as trainee Early Years Teachers and for their settings:

... they're good in the rhetoric but, in reality, if I wanted to implement it in the setting that I'm in now it would take a lot of work ... it would take a lot of understanding from management (University 1 Postgraduate KJ)

Like the (undergraduate) trainees' in Murray's study (2013), the postgraduate trainees at University 2 seemed to the researchers at University 1 to show a readiness to work at the difficult space of professional practice. One of them commented

there's always more that you can learn, situations that you haven't thought of or experiences that crop up, you've got, you know, there's all different angles, all different thoughts you're rejigging everything you've got and all the thoughts and stereotypes that you had (University 2 Postgraduate WC).

The researchers from University 2, however, pointed out that they felt that their trainee Early Years Teachers were not as reflective as the postgraduates at University 1 and simply did not experience the same theory–practice dissonance. The postgraduate trainees at University 1 did not readily find a way of negotiating 'congruence between beliefs and behaviour which entailed the adoption of particular strategies and ways of working which enabled them to make an impact' (Murray 2013, 536). They appeared to feel alone in seeking to reconcile their beliefs with the requirements of the Standards and struggled to find ways to 'act in what they believed to be the best interests of the children, families and communities with whom they worked' (Brock 2013, 40).

Lack of Compass and Experiences of Turbulence

It is readily acknowledged that the small scale of the study means that its conclusions may have limited validity beyond the providers studied. However, as discussed earlier, the critical realist methodology does provide a framework for considering possible explanations of the trainees' experiences beyond the particular cases studied since critical realism conceives of particular data ('effects') as providing evidence of broader generative mechanisms. Thus, tentatively, it is suggested that perhaps what we are seeing here are the challenges for trainees and staff alike in negotiating the new experience of EYITT amidst the cacophony of competing discourses. Whilst much has been written about teacher education in England, its value in the new field of EYITT is less certain, suggesting a lack of compass points. Britzman

(2007, 2) makes an interesting observation regarding more established forms of teacher education when she notes that

newcomers enter teacher education looking backward on their years of school experience and project it into the present. Teacher educators greet these newcomers as if they lack school experience and have no past Implicitly, the structure and ethos of teacher education rely on our childhood view: this oddly resistant childhood is cast in cement with the mantra, “we learn from experience”

In many ways, EYITT in England is rather different. Trainee Early Years Teachers are no doubt influenced by their own school experiences but they will not necessarily have had experience of the kind of early childhood education into which they are entering as novices since such provision was far from widespread even ten or fifteen years ago. At both universities, although the teacher educators had experience of Early Years Professional Training and expertise as lecturers on Early Childhood Studies degrees, as early childhood practitioners and/or as tutors for lower level professional roles, EYITT expectations are new. What teacher training there has been (leading to QTS, for work with children aged three to five) has been focused on the maintained schools’ sectors. In the case of EYITT, what it is to be a trainee Early Years’ Teacher, qualified Early Years Teacher, or to offer EYITT in the range of private, voluntary and independent, as well as maintained sectors, is not at all well-established and involves notions still very much under construction by people with varied understandings about how the role is to be understood. Nonetheless, some of what Britzman (2007) says may be helpful in understanding the ways in which early years’ trainees and teacher educators seek to make sense of their lack of bearings. Both trainees and early years’ teacher educators seem strongly influenced by developmental and experiential notions of teaching and learning. They also seem strangely unaware of how these reflect particular regimes of truth, which at other times, both attach considerable importance to challenging.

In attempting to construct the beliefs and practices of EYITT, teacher educators and student teachers are faced with ‘a world they did not make’ (Britzman 2007, 7) and both sources of knowledge and available tools (from developmental psychology) which show signs of erosion and corrosion. Britzman (2007, 11) argues that one of the possible effects of post modernity is that the certainties of the dominant discourses are in disarray and this has implications for both trainee teachers and teacher-educators:

even our meta-narratives wear out. This loss may provoke us to defend nostalgia.... gazing on what we imagine as a time before, when everything ... was certain. This imaginary loss renders our education melancholic, filled with complaint that is then evacuated into the other who fails.

This is difficult territory for the trainees, teacher educators and placement staff to navigate. In an uncharted early years' educational landscape where there has been little time for ideas to be formed let alone wear out, the few signposts that do exist are slowly rotting and can no longer act as solid guides. The regulatory frameworks of Primary and Secondary Initial Teacher Training are newly being imposed by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) on EYITT. There are signs of the trainees and perhaps the teacher educators looking back nostalgically on past certainties to a figured world of early childhood dominated for many by notions of the importance of following children's interests.

This perhaps means that 'the aim of a postmodern teacher education ... to supplant the child development knowledge base with a range of postmodern theoretical ideas so that a new foundation for practice is created' (Ryan and Grieshaber (2005, 43) is all the more difficult to achieve in this new area of EYITT in England. Whilst there may be a commitment to providing 'a set of analytic tools providing alternative ways of seeing, understanding, and acting on the same situation' (Ryan and Grieshaber 2005, 43) this is no easy matter when this involves confronting economic discourses which may be uncomfortable, unpalatable and a challenge to the nostalgias of early childhood. Trainee teachers develop their practice in placements whose survival in the market increasingly means attention to cost demands and the performance obligations placed on them by regulatory bodies. Campbell-Barr (2014, 12) draws attention to the importance of 'how both entrepreneurialism and the feminisation ... interplay with the romanticisation of childhood discourse'. This may help to explain why the trainees return to familiar ways of seeing rather than searching for ways of attending ethically to imperatives they do not value. As Britzman (2007, 10) notes

with this new instrumentalism ... learners must become adept, flexible, and able to judge knowledge in terms of its use value, its applicability to real life concerns, and its prestige. But this means that skills supplant ideas, technique is confused with authority and responsibility, and know-how short circuits the existential question of indeterminacy.

This instrumentalism means that there is little space or time in which Early Years Teachers and their educators can develop the critical approaches needed to engage with complex uncertainty in approaching their work with young children.

Whilst teacher education for all age phases is seen increasingly by central government as a craft best learnt in an expert–apprentice relationship in the workplace, this rather overlooks the importance of being able to create afresh, rethink and transform, rather than merely replicate. Approaches that promote creativity and transformation are key in ensuring that educators are able to support children’s development and learning no matter what the future holds. Such approaches need much greater attention to the distinctive contribution that a university education and professional formation bring to EYITT but they also require persistence and resilience in the face of a policy context with different imperatives. In the current study, EYITT appears as a place of anguished tussle, where university educators struggle to guide and scaffold trainees’ professional formation. A crisis of understanding in relation to early childhood comes to coincide with the imposition of particular ways of understanding teaching and learning, which trainees and teacher educators alike perceive to be the result of the exercise of political power rather than emancipatory knowledge and practices.

The Space of Authorship: Refuge in the Turbulence?

Whilst the trainees (and perhaps even the settings) appear uncomfortable with the market forces that mean that certain approaches are favoured, they find themselves as novices in a sector where this is the dominant provision and where the demands of the market cannot simply be ignored. Perhaps this leads both trainees and their teacher educators to return to the nostalgia of views of early childhood as a place of development, innocence and education for its own sake. We need to ask ourselves, however, whether we are being ethical as academics and teacher educators if we do not support them in engaging with these other discourses, given that their futures depend to a very considerable degree on being able to find a way of satisfying these demands? Are we being ethical too if we do not support them in negotiating the requirements of the EYFS, and the way that it assesses the performance of children, since these are also the measures against which they and the children will be measured? Following Hammond et al (2015, 147) there is a sense in which ethical EYITT means finding a way of

engaging in early childhood practice which involves ‘participation, empowerment and mutuality’ which ‘is neither pre-determined nor defined by intended outcomes, yet is conscious of the requirement to attain them’.

The negotiation of professional identity, practice and being, in the context of a marketised early childhood sector, is thus at the very heart of becoming an Early Years Teacher in England. It is one that requires persistence and resilience on the part of trainees, qualities that higher education is perhaps only now coming to understand that it needs to foster in young people, despite Sumsion (2003) having highlighted the significance of these attributes more than 10 years ago. Thus they struggle to ‘find deep and sustaining personal and professional satisfaction’ (Sumsion 2004, 276), in the face of instrumental policy contexts which are often at odds with their more creative and dynamic academic and professional concerns. For Moss (2010, 15) being a professional, involves ‘being able to construct knowledge from diverse sources, involving awareness of paradigmatic plurality, curiosity and border crossing, and acknowledging that knowledge is always partial, perspectival and provisional’. None of this is easy. The experience of EYITT could be understood in Vygotskian terms (1978) as a journey through a zone of proximal development; or in Holland et al’s terms (1998) as a figured world in which trainees work alongside and become expert by being permitted, or not, and in varying degrees, to participate in practice. It is a journey through new terrain in which novice early years’ teacher educators struggle to support them and in which the trainees have difficulty in finding their own way, bringing them to the point of giving up.

This seems to point to a need for the academy, teacher educators and placement mentors to pay a good deal more attention than hitherto to the support needs of this new group of professionals. Engagement in the figured world or movement through the zone of proximal development normally involve scaffolding by expert guides. In the case of EYITT, participation involves challenge and struggle with the uncertain and treacherous causal tendencies/discourses. This is undertaken with the support only of uncertain teacher educators who are also new in their roles, requiring a great deal of reflexivity and fortitude on the part of the trainees. In answering this challenge, the trainees in the current study encounter competing discourses (developmental psychology, child-initiated learning, the

quality mechanisms of the state, the operation of the market in early childhood provision) and struggle to know what to believe and how to practice. Whilst in many ways they do recognise how they are ‘positioned within discourses and how discourses can be used to position oneself more powerfully’ (Sumsion 2004, 288), in varying degrees, they stumble over unfamiliar terrain. In so doing, they find themselves slipping between ‘taking on these different languages and perspectives willy-nilly’ from the competing discourses and ‘developing a more stable “authorial stance”’ (Holland et al 1998, 182). They struggle with how ‘differing identifications can be counterposed, brought to work against one another, to create a position, our own voice, from which we work’ (Holland et al 1998, 211). Some trainees only ever appear to take on ‘these different languages and perspectives willy-nilly’. Others seem, at least sometimes, to manage to persist, to engage with a punishing, difficult, turbulent professional flight on which they have difficulty with working ‘within, or at least against, a set of constraints’ (Holland et al 1998, 171). Thus, they appear to need greater resilience and support in also experiencing these ‘as a set of possibilities for utterance’ (Holland et al 1998, 171) in order to find reflexive, creative and transformative ways of working with young children. It is suggested that beginning early years’ teachers need greater support from teacher educators and experienced practitioners, in order to persist in the dialogism that will enable them to negotiate the spaces between policy, theory and beliefs as they seek constantly to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct ethical professional identities for themselves.

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