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Being a manager in an English nursery

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Being a Manager in the English Early Years sector

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Abstract

This article draws on interviews with 29 managers and deputy managers within 15 nurseries in the private sector in England. The author argues that, whilst there is a growing literature on management and professionalism within the Early Years (EY) sector, there is less known about the actual experiences of being a manager in this context. Many of the individuals who are promoted into a management role did not, until recently, have the training to support them. Whilst individuals are being encouraged to participate in the managerial roles now demanded by the professionalisation agenda, it could be argued that the traditional EY workforce are primarily motivated by a strong desire to work with children. Even if their own employer provides in-house management training or the opportunity to participate in national schemes such as EYPS, these young women, like many professionals becoming managers, move away from what they like doing best – working with the client/children. The research outlined in this paper explores these issues by relaying individuals' stories of what it is like to be a manager in the EY context.

KEY WORDS: Early Years, management, manager, training, development

Résumé

Cet article dessine sur les entretiens avec 29 directeurs et les directeurs adjoints dans 15 garderies dans le secteur privé en Angleterre. L'auteur se dispute cela, pendant qu'il y a une littérature croissante sur la direction et le professionalisme dans les Premiers Ans (EY) le secteur, il y a moins connu des véritables expériences d'être un directeur dans ce contexte. Beaucoup des individus qui sont promus dans un rôle de direction n'ont pas fait, jusqu' à récemment, avoir l'entraînement pour les soutenir. Pendant que les individus sont encouragés à participer dans les rôles directoriaux maintenant exigé par le programme de professionnalisation, on pourrait soutenir que la main-d'oeuvre d'EY traditionnelle est principalement motivée par un fort désir de travailler avec les enfants. Même si leur propre employeur fournit l'entraînement de direction sur place ou l'occasion de participer dans les arrangements nationaux comme EYPS, ces jeunes femmes, comme beaucoup de gens de métier qui deviennent des directeurs, s'éloignez de qu'ils aiment faisant meilleur – travaillant avec les client/enfants. La recherche esquissée dans ce papier explore ces problèmes par relaying les histoires des individus de ce que c'est comme être directeur dans le contexte d'EY.

Abriss

Dieser Artikel greift auf Interviews mit 29 Managern und stellvertretenden Managern innerhalb 15 Kinderstuben im privaten Sektor in England zurück. Der Autor argumentiert das, während es eine wachsende Literatur auf Leitung und Professionalität innerhalb den Frühen Jahren (EY) Sektor gibt, gibt es weniger bekannt um die eigentlichen Erfahrungen, ein Manager in diesem Kontext zu sein. Viele der Individuen, die in eine Leitungsrolle gefördert sind, nicht bis kürzlich, hat die zu Ausbildung machten, sie

unterstützen. Während Individuen ermutigt werden, sich an den leitenden Rollen jetzt hat verlangt durch die professionalisation Tagesordnung zu beteiligen, könnte es argumentiert werden, dass der traditionell EY Arbeitskraft hauptsächlich von einem starken Wunsch angeregt werden, mit Kindern zu arbeiten. Selbst wenn ihr eigener Arbeitgeber innerbetriebliches Management-Training oder die Gelegenheit versorgt, sich an nationalen Schemata zu beteiligen, wie zum Beispiel EYPS, diese jungen Frauen, wie viele Fachleute, die Manager werden, weg bewegt, von was sie mögen, machend best – arbeitend mit dem Kunden/Kindern. Die Forschung, die in diesem Papier skizziert wird, erforscht diese Ausgaben durch Übertragen die Geschichten von Individuen, wovon es ist, sein mögen ein Manager im EY Kontext.

Sumario

Este artículo utiliza entrevistas con 29 directores y subdirectores dentro de 15 guarderías infantiles en el sector privado en Inglaterra. El autor discute eso, mientras hay una literatura creciente en la gestión y el profesionalismo dentro de los Años Tempranos (EY) sector, hay menos supo de las experiencias verdaderas de ser a un director en este contexto. Muchos de los individuos que son promovidos en un papel de gestión no hicieron, hasta recientemente, tiene la instrucción para apoyarlos. Mientras individuos sean favorecidos a tomar parte en los papeles directivos ahora demandado por el orden del día de la profesionalización, podría ser discutido que la plantilla tradicional de EY es motivada principalmente por un deseo fuerte para trabajar con niños. Incluso si su propio empleador proporcione la instrucción interna de gestión o la oportunidad de tomar parte en esquemas nacionales como EYPS, estas jóvenes mujeres, como muchos profesionales

que llegan a ser directores, se marchan de lo que quieren hacer mejor – trabajando con los cliente/niños. La investigación resumida en este papel explora estos asuntos retransmitiendo las historias de individuos de lo que es quiere ser un director en el contexto de EY.

Being a Manager in the English Early Years sector

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to add to the growing literature about the changes that have been taking place in the Early Years (EY) sector within England within the past decade. It will be argued that the traditional images of the EY sector and profile of the EY workforce may mitigate the introduction of managerialism. The introduction of rational management concepts into an emotive, caring context presents a challenge in a sector where: "the research shows that childcare work is seen as intrinsically a woman's job…draw[ing] on attributes that women see themselves as possessing rather than requiring the acquisition of new skills and professional competencies." (Penn 2000:128). In short, taking on a management role may be difficult in a context permeated with self and public images of the job being largely un-professional and something anyone (woman) could do. The introduction of the EYPS qualification has been significant in the professionalism agenda but insistence upon professional qualifications may exclude or deter many individuals who are, or would make, excellent carers. Moreover, many EY employees will not have aspirations to move into management positions as this may take them away from their caring roles. Yet, because of the growth of the EY sector, in many

4

cases young female nursery employees are being asked to take on managerial roles and to be, in effect, the managers of small businesses, responsible for making a profit as well as ensuring the satisfaction of numerous stakeholders. In this context, it seems vital that there are adequate induction, training and development systems in place for them to be able to deal with this difficult role.

The focus of this paper is on a particular part of the EY sector – the private nursery. Until the current recession, this was one of the fastest growing areas of small business growth. Many private nurseries in the UK have become highly profitable small businesses which require conformity to exacting legal and quality standards and the concerns of multiple stakeholders. The provision of customer satisfaction is vital with a clientele (parents) increasingly demanding both professionalism and an environment of caring and trust. Urban describes the EY context thus: "the dilemma unfolds between the day-to day experience of having to act concretely, spontaneously and autonomously in ever-changing, uncertain situations which, to a large extent, are determined by factors beyond the practitioners control, and the pressure that arises from increasing socio-cultural and socio-economic expectations to produce predetermined outcomes in this complex work context" (2008:136). Nursery managers are often responsible for attracting new business, meeting financial targets and managing budgets and paperwork. People management skills are also paramount in a sector where attracting and keeping staff is a major problem.

The aim of this study is to report the experiences of a group of nursery managers and deputy managers with the aim of providing some insight into how they cope with being placed into a manager role. In most sectors, studies which describe the personal experience of managing or 'being manager' (Parker 2004) are relatively sparse. However, it is important that we recognise the potential difficulties for individuals in both understanding and utilising the numerous management concepts on offer. In the caring professions, individuals have often entered that profession because of a particular set of values and a desire to work directly with people. Taking on a management position – and persona - may be very different to the values and personal interests that originally motivated them to pursue that career.

Changes in the Early Years sector

Over the past decade, many countries have set ambitious policy goals to increase both the quantity and quality of EY provision. The relentless expansion of this sector has been mirrored across many countries, with differing solutions as to how this might be funded and promoted at national level (see, for example, Oberhuemer and Ulich 1997). Over a decade ago, Drury et al flagged that "this is an exciting time to be involved in the field of early years care and education. The needs of children under five are now firmly on the political agenda." (2000:1)

The provision of child care for working parents has been promoted as having important implications for the social and economic success of the UK. The UK is further ahead than most, introducing several major initiatives in the EY sector in recent years and reflecting

the huge growth in demand based on changing patterns of employment amongst parents with pre-school age children. Christopherson suggested that, 'in all cases, women's changing employment patterns within the broader labour market are at the heart of the incentives and capacities re-shaping caring services' (1997:12). In the UK, the number of working women with a child under five doubled between 1984 and 2000 (27% to 54%) (Cameron et al 2002). And in the second quarter of 2008, more than two thirds of working-age women with dependent children (68 %) were in employment and 57% of those had children aged under 5 (Labour Force Survey, Q2 2008, Office for National Statistics). This socio-economic shift has led to an ever-increasing demand for quality child care and extra-ordinary growth in this business area.

The government in England has sought to push 'a transformational reform agenda designed to improve life chances for all and reduce inequalities in our society' (DfES 2006). This has involved a plethora of well-publicised initiatives such as *Sure Start* Childrens Centres. These reforms are intended to meet growing demands from parents but also to integrate EY services and professionalise the workforce. The main purpose of the Children's Workforce Development Council established in 2005, for example, was the strengthening of EY workforce through the creation of new qualifications, roles, training opportunities and career development and pathways to raise the quality and status of the EY workforce. A key CWDC initiative has been the development of a new Early Years Professional (EYP) role. The EYP role is intended to achieve graduate leadership across the EY services in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. There has also been the introduction of the Senior Practitioner created in 2001 (DfES 2001) and the

launching of the NPQICL ((National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership) in 2009. Despite these developments, in the English context, notes Miller 'the diverse roles and responsibilities of early years practitioners, the variety of settings they work in, and the lack of a professional registration body and formal pay structures make it difficult to agree what constitutes an early years professional' (2008:266).

Whilst the importance of the EY agenda at national level has been welcomed, the speed of change and the new roles and qualifications introduced have been met with concern by some commentators. Moss, for example, welcomes the attention being given to the EY sector but, in terms of new qualifications, the "… training of childhood workers and the structuring of the workforce itself cannot be divorced from fundamental questions about early childhood services … country …institutions and how we conceptualise the early childhood worker." (2000:106). Both of the new Senior Practitioner and EYP roles were, suggests Miller (2008), implemented within relatively short timescales with little time for consultation and reflection. Whilst professionalisation is welcomed within the sector, there is a fear that it is being done *to* rather than in consultation with the EY sector. Osgood (2006) suggests that the regulatory approach of the reforms are intended as a means to control both what is happening within the EY sector and the EY workforce. Simpson (2010) also noted that that a key perspective in the EY professionalisation debate is that of social constructivism; that is, that government reforms are an attempt to impose a particular view and method. This runs contradictory to what Osgood (2006:8) terms the "essential counter discourse of emotionality" – a key part of working with EY children.

Within this wider debate, it is the introduction of management and business models into the EY sector which is the focus of this paper. More specifically, the personal experiences of young women in the EY sector who, in the case study organisation, had been chosen to take on the position of manager or deputy manager. Firstly, we explore further how the concepts of managerialism could be argued to sit uncomfortably within the EY context.

Management concepts within the Early Years sector

Some research (for example, Rodd 1996, Oberhuemer 2005) in the EY sector has drawn attention to the increasing expansion and complexity of roles; including those 'at the top'. Indeed, the findings of an international leadership project highlighted the 'urgent need to review the ways in which professionals conceptualise leadership in early childhood' (Ebbeck and Waniganayake 2003). But working with young children has long been viewed as a non-professional vocation. Women are still viewed as being the main carer for young children and arrangements for child care are often run on an informal basis through relatives or friends. Cameron et al (2001) describe the dominant understandings of EY work as being associated primarily with mothering, not necessarily requiring any type of qualification. Traditionally, the EY workforce in England has relatively low levels of education and the variety of qualifications and the type and level of training required is confusing, ranging from the totally unqualified to graduate and postgraduate qualifications (Miller 2008). In 2005, just 12% were qualified to level 4 or above (postgraduate level) (DfES 2005). Indeed, girls leaving school who "express an interest in

working with children are likely to be steered towards teaching if academic attainment is good enough; towards a childcare career if it is not. Unqualified women returning to work are often steered towards it too because is building on something they can already do, look after children." *(*Penn 2000:116). EY work is still poorly paid and poor rates of pay tend to affect how work is valued in society. Despite this, child care workers have been found to one of the occupational groups expressing most satisfaction with their jobs (Rose 1999). This intrinsic motivation may represent another factor deterring childcare workers from seeking professional qualifications and wanting to move into a management position. Experience and a 'way with children' are often valued by both carers and parents as being more important than formal training. A tension arises, then, from the dichotomy between a workforce that is construed as caring, maternal and gendered, as opposed to professional, degree educated and highly trained. It echoes Osgood's (2006) concerns about professional autonomy as management concepts such as bureaucracy, accountability and performativity sit uneasily in a caring and emotive environment.

Management in the Early Years sector

Management may have been recognised as an important aspect of the progression of the child care field by some (Rodd 1997, Smith and Langston 2000, Moyles and Yates 2004) but there was, until recently, little provision of management training for those moving into a management position. Some studies have shown how the quality of programmes and services for young children and their families is related to effective leadership by those in management positions (Rodd 1994, Stipek and Ogana 2000, Muijs et al. 2004)

but studies in this area remain few. Similarly, the concept of leadership in early childhood "remains weakly theorised, and resources to support and inform a distinctive early childhood leadership culture are sparse" (Woodrow and Busch 2008:83) .Generic management skills are offered but with little reference and understanding of this particular work environment. Kagan (1994), for example, has suggested that traditional approaches to understanding leadership ignore two central features of the child care context. Firstly, the multiplicity of stakeholders in child care (parents, children, schools, authorise, etc.) means that organisational strategies and processes in this sector require higher levels of flexibility and individualisation. Secondly, women tend to prefer and utilise shared leadership models, promoting an ethos of collaboration and collective success for all. In at least one study of female EY practitioners, talking to each other and sharing thoughts and feelings were thought to be key factors of the work (Moyles and Suschitzy 1997). These stereotypical images are strong and, as Moyles points out, those who work in caring roles could not be blamed for feeling that 'they are regularly criticised for ... inclining ...towards 'non-professional' and 'woolly' thinking." This, despite the fact that a "key skill in child care is the ability to handle a range of events, and sometimes potential crises, in a clear headed and rational way" (2001:86).

Case Study

The case study organisation was a group of private nurseries in the UK that, at the time of study, had 25 nurseries and was in the process of opening more (in 2011, now 36). Several of the nurseries were new or were newly acquired and the average time in post for both managers and deputy managers was two and a half years. The senior

> **Comment [DP1]:** Re. information about number of managers and deputies and how long in post

11

management team within the organisation liked to monitor closely what was happening in the nurseries, monitoring performance through strict deadlines and targets and often making visits. Competition was encouraged between the different nurseries through mechanisms such as sports competitions and employee awards but there were also regular social events such as an annual Ball for all levels of employee. The level of training was relatively high and staff development was encouraged including, at the time of study, the start of an internal management development programme for a few selected individuals. Managers and staff were offered places in the nurseries for their own children at subsidised rates, a share and pension scheme had just been introduced and, senior management told us, both salaries and retention rates were higher than the national average.

Method

11 nursery managers and 17 deputy managers (4 of whom were acting managers at the time of study) across 15 nurseries were interviewed during a 3 month period. The interviews, each approximately an hour long, were semi-structured and used to capture in-depth accounts of how these individuals with new managerial roles had experienced this transition. Interviewees were told that this was a project sponsored by the MD but that all data was anonymous and confidential. It was emphasised to them that, although the interview had some structure in terms of its content, they were welcome to volunteer additional information should they feel it was relevant to the overall aims of the session (Marginson1996). All the participants agreed to have the sessions tape-recorded and the tapes were transcribed verbatim. The research was framed within a social constructivist

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paradigm with the aim of understanding individuals as "active participants in the restructuring process and analyse the ways that individuals challenge, shape and resist the changes that are affecting them" (Thomas and Linstead 2002: 376). The qualitative approach was utilised to elicit the type of deeply textured data which is often lost when using extracted quantitative measures. Using a semi-structured interview, the intention was to produce a holistic view of what it is like to take on the role of a nursery manager as a EY practitioner; to understand more about what it is like to be a manager in the EY nursery sector, what the interviewees thought were the main issues for EY managers generally and how the job of a manager differed from that of a nursery nurse. The data was then subjected to qualitative content analysis, focussing on narratives and narrative trajectories in the form of thematic review (Morphew and Hartley 2007, Price 2010).

Findings

Being a manager

One predominant theme in the interviews was just how hard it was being a manager in terms of the amount of work to be done and the over-riding sense of responsibility. Most individuals said that they had to work long hours to perform all aspects of the job, often staying late and putting extra time in to cover for colleagues. One individual explained how:

> You have a big responsibility with the children but also as a manager. As compared with five years ago, we are very much like business managers. Although you're part of a company you are very much running a little business. If you don't do well it affects everything.

13

This highlights the 'performativity' culture of the case study organisation. If paperwork and monthly budgets were submitted late, they were quickly chased by Head Office and if targets or profits were down, the nursery manager was asked why. Visits by the senior management team were seen as helpful and 'friendly' but also having a sense of purpose – to check up on what was happening. Interviewees talked about the worry of 'getting it right', of only having been 'shown once' and that they didn't want to 'look stupid' by telephoning head office to talk through how to compile the monthly accounts. Some of this could be put down to inexperience on the part of the nursery managers and deputies and they often coped with this by calling other nursery managers that they knew for help in this and other matters. Bu the weight of responsibility and the idea that the role was perhaps harder than they had anticipated were recurrent themes in respondents' stories. One described how:

> I think a lot of people are disillusioned by just how hard being a manager is. Not just physically, emotionally, mentally; but there is so much to take in, especially with (name of organisation); they have a lot of policies and procedures of their own. And it does take a while to get your head round it.

As rules and regulations in the EY sector have gradually increased; the feeling that there were a plethora of policies to deal with was perhaps not unusual. However, some respondents had worked in other nurseries and organisation and or, in two cases, the Public sector and they too felt that the internal regulations of this particular organisation were high.

Several individuals thought that many different skills needed to be developed as a manager. One individual described how she felt that a nursery manager needed:

> …many-faceted skills really. You're dealing with outside agencies, parents that are really
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> feeling guilt ridden that they're out at work and their children are here. You're a
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> counsellor, you're dealing with staff and their problems. You're an accountant, a secretary,
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> it's just everything - and you just started off training to be a nursery nurse.

This emphasises the myriad of skills needed and the amount of training, potentially, that needs to be in place to ensure that things get done and that the individual feels she knows how to do them. As mentioned previously, management training appeared to have taken place in this organisation primarily by means of being shown what to do by another manager. Despite there being some provision of management training in this organisation (in its infancy at the time of study), most individuals seemed to feel that the best method of learning how to be a manager was to observe someone else doing it; seventeen of our interviewees were deputies (four were acting managers) and were learning the job that way. The disadvantage of this, some interviewees felt, was that they had only being shown once as mentioned in the previous example of preparing budgets. The lack of formal or on-going training was sometimes difficult in the sense of, as one interviewee put it:

> We went to college for two years to learn how to work with children. We're then expected
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> to run a business with someone showing you once, which is quite a challenge.

As discussed previously, the case study organisation was perceived by most interviewees to set very exacting standards and strict deadlines which had to be adhered to. One individual described how she perceived them to have:

> … fantastically high standards - and trying to get everything right can sometimes be a
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> struggle. You have to keep to the deadlines and some of the office procedures can be a bit
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> daunting.

Another manager felt that:

> That's a big pressure we have got – to make a profit. We'd be in trouble if we made a loss. I think a lot is expected of managers in this company. You are meant to be exceptional in everything you do, they expect everything to click and if it doesn't they come down really heavy on you.

Senior management were felt to be generally supportive through, for example, visits to the nurseries and an occasional letter of thanks for a job well done but, as one deputy manager said:

> You certainly know when you have done something wrong. They're not too bad on the whole usually but you have to keep your guard up and you can't let the standards slip.

Another echoed this view:

> They will often say we appreciate what you do but with all due respect to them they don't quite realise how much we do and how much is expected of you. There are high standards and you are only human at the end of the day. So I think maybe it's a bit of ignorance on their part, it's not that they don't want to support us but they don't appreciate how difficult the job is.

It seems clear that the senior management team did expect a lot from their nursery management teams and probably did, in fact, appreciate the range of responsibilities that they had. Informal management development often works well but the provision of formal management induction and training programmes might act to both acknowledge and to develop the range of competencies required by the role. 'Keeping your guard up', feeling you need to be 'exceptional', finding it 'daunting'; perceiving that they'll come down heavy on you' puts enormous pressure on individuals trying to make sense of a new role. Perhaps the speed of growth of the company and the relative newness of some

of the managers did not help but it could be suggested that the learning on the job approach may not be sufficient in terms of coping with a management role. Another pressure was felt to be the sheer responsibility of being in charge and, of course, in addition to managerial responsibilities, there were multiple stakeholders to keep happy – including the needs of the children. One interviewee described how:

> The fact is that you have got fifty two children here and some of them are very tiny. That is a big responsibility and sometimes keeps you awake at night.

In order to cope with regulations and develop the relationships with parents, social services and so on, any management training in the EY sector will have to focus on the external environment as well as the internal, nursery one. Indeed, the demands from multiple stakeholders such as parents, OFSTED inspectors and so on were mentioned by several interviewees as being a big responsibility and also how the expectations of stakeholders were perceived to have changed. One manager, for example talked about the raised expectations of parents these days:

> What they used to be happy with 10 years ago, they're not happy with now. Because of the media and so on, their expectations are a lot higher.

The challenges of all this, of course, were not always described in negative terms. The majority of interviewees said that they enjoyed the responsibilities of the job and maintaining the high standards of the organisation. Some of their comments suggested that they were surprised they could do it and had certainly not expected to have been working in a managerial capacity when they started their career. Vincent & Braun (2010) talk of the 'morally worthy nature of childcare' and it is clear that, at any level including that of manager, there is a great deal of satisfaction to be gained from working in the EY sector. However, working with the children and working with their peers appeared to be a

17

major source of this intrinsic job satisfaction and, for many, moving into a management role had meant losing this. This was a strong theme in the interviews, particularly for deputies, who described how becoming a manager had meant, for many, 'leaving' the group of girls with whom they had worked and now being seen as somewhat 'apart'. One individual described how:

> It did take me a while. I was quite a sensitive soul when I first started - when I first became assistant manager, because the girls had seen me as a nursery nurse and they didn't really treat me any differently. I would say 'could you make sure you do X, Y and Z' and they'd just sort of look at me.

Another individual said that:

> I had been here in this nursery from day one and the girls very much saw me as one of the girls. The transition for them seeing me as doing a bit of everything to then being a manager was difficult.

In this context, people management skills and the afore-mentioned relationships skills become central again. What might also be of importance in terms of designing management training is a preparatory stage where nursery employees get an insight into what the management role is about – it might also help to alleviate any concerns they might have about applying for such a role. Several individuals commented that their colleagues appeared unable to appreciate how hard being a manager was. One interviewee said:

> I think a lot of them think we sit on little ivory towers and dabble away at the computer, I don't think they actually realise how difficult it is.

18

This is not unique to the EY sector and often the lot of the middle manager, a growing area in the management literature (Fenton O'Creevy, 2001, Parker, 2004, for example) and individuals who have moved 'up' often look to their new peer group for support (Preston & Price, 2010). This also seemed to be the case with these EY managers who described their main source of peer support as being from other managers at other nurseries; indeed, this seemed to be an integral part of their informal development as managers.

A Dual role

Keeping in contact with the children in the nursery was important to almost all the individuals interviewed and most said they often worked extra hours not only to be able to fulfil their responsibilities as the manager but also to be able to spend at least some time doing what they enjoyed the most; being with the children. One individual summed this up nicely when she said; "it's quite a nice relief to be hugged and have someone playing with your hair after trying to balance the books." Another individual added to the description of this tension between the two roles by saying:

> I think that is the really fun part of it, planning and you know enjoying, watching the children doing their activities and seeing them develop. Whereas sometimes I feel a bit as if I'm number crunching and form filling and filing. I sometimes think this isn't actually what I was trained to do at college. So every now and then I have to ditch it, delegate, and go back and plonk myself in a room for a morning or afternoon to get back in touch with the reality.

Maintaining this dual role was largely felt to be difficult by most respondents. One explained how:

> One minute you're in a room changing a nappy and the next minute you've got to answer the phone and talk to somebody about X, Y and Z. Or if you've in the middle of doing an activity and the phone will go and it's somebody from head office and you've got to go with talking to a child to talking about your financial situation. I'm always thinking about 3 or 4 different things at once, always, continually.

Most of our interviewees were surprised to find themselves in a management role in that they had not planned to do this when they began working in the EY sector. This dilemma concerning a dual professional identity – in this case, that of nursery nurse and nursery manager (see McGillvray 2008) warrants further research in an EY sector and continues to be an emerging area of literature in management studies generally (see, for example, Ashforth and Mael 1989, Hogg and Terry 2000 and Humpreys and Brown 2002). Sluss and Ashforth suggest that "roles are a central anchor for the social construction of self" and that the "social construction of identities tend to crystallize around roles"(2007:12). The loss of contact with the client and one's former colleagues and peers is a theme found in many other accounts of professionals becoming managers in other sectors (in the Health Service, see, for example, Preston & Loan-Clarke, 2000; in Higher Education, see, for example, Preston & Price, 2010) and appears to be an repercussion of being a middle manager generally (Fenton-O'Creevy 2001, Thomas and Linstead 2002).

Conclusions and Discussion

The EY sector continues to be in a period of major change, receiving the kind of governmental and public attention reminiscent of the health and education sectors in

recent years. Despite the introduction of professional qualifications, it could be suggested that the image of a career working with very young children continues to be gendered and relatively low status; something that everyone (woman) could do. Increasing demand for child care by working parents, governmental agendas and the need to monitor standards of care in a rapidly growing sector has emphasised the need for professional training and development including that at a managerial level. Individuals who work in the EY sector have found themselves being asked to take on management roles which are demanding and complex, requiring skills that are not always supported by formal training or adequate preparation induction and development within the role.

The case study outlined here has described the experiences and the perceptions of a group of relatively new managers in an English EY organisation. This initial data seems to suggest that they often found it difficult to deal with the work load and responsibilities it involved, were often prepared to work extra hours to maintain their contact with the children and had found it difficult to leave their peers. More positively, interviewees also felt that they were making a contribution to the organisation and enjoyed having the opportunity to develop themselves and others. They were challenged and generally surprised at what they had achieved and were doing (being a manager). This perhaps aligns with Goodliff's (2007) finding that EYPS candidates report an increase in self-esteem on achieving the qualification, despite expressing anxieties about the status and long-term future of the role. With the right preparation and support, perhaps more individuals could be helped into, and through, management positions in the sector.

An acknowledged limitation of this study is its generalisability. There is a need to explore different sectors of child care provision, not least those nurseries in the public sector and individuals running their own small nurseries. Many of these interviewees were relatively young and had not been in a management position very long; the peer support from other nursery managers helped and, in this particular organisation, a management training scheme was being piloted. A further period of study in the case study organisation now might reveal new insights into how the young women were now handling the management role and how the demands and required skills had progressed. In amongst the anxieties, were many positive aspects of being a nursery manager were described by these young women, not least how they had surprised themselves. Perhaps these benefits should be built upon in the design of management training for the EY sector.

What has been highlighted here is how the pressure and responsibility of being in that role might deter new recruits or might hamper the career development of those who have stepped up to do the role. These points noted, it is proposed that this paper offers an important insight into the experiences of young female professionals (nursery nurses) taking on management roles in an extremely complex context. It adds to the wider literature about professionals becoming managers, being a middle manager and the tensions of performing and maintaining a dual identity within the workplace. Some of these initial findings appear to reflect those found in earlier studies of new managers in other sectors such as health care and education. It also offers insight into the practicalities of management training within an EY context; that is, issues relating to the problem of

introducing rational systems and concepts into a complex, people centred environment.

Several comments from interviewees here suggested that their peers did not perhaps appreciate, or aspire to move into, a management position; in this respect understanding more about that experience and feeding this into the induction and development systems for nursery managers is likely to continue to be an important issue for the profession in the near future. Within the various international EY frameworks and qualifications to prepare and equip child care practitioners into the future, this exploration of being a manager in the nursery sector should begin an important debate.

(5470 words, excluding Abstract)

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