Placing Early Childhood Research on the Map

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Response to Professor Nóirín Hayes

- Welcome opportunity
- Explosion of research in relation to children over the past 30 years (Luddy and Smith 2014)
- Timely to review the scope and contexts of research into the broad field of early childhood education
- Issues in regard to diversity of the field, training, curriculum, pedagogy, policy and professional identity
Diversity of Field of Early Childhood Education

- Part-time and full-time provision mainly by private sector for children 0 – 5 years
- Public funding for socio-economically disadvantaged areas and children with additional needs
- Free Preschool Year, 3 – 4 years: universal provision with public funding, though some issues remain unresolved
- Early years of primary school, 5 – 6 years: universal provision with public funding
- Different pay, conditions, regulation and training for staff
Level 5 and 6 courses for ECE settings
Level 7 and 8 courses in Institutes of Technology, universities and colleges of education for ECE settings
Level 8 courses in colleges of education and one university for Primary school
Level 9 and 10 education/courses in Institutes of Technology, universities and colleges of education
Range of qualifications, course content and placement experience
Diverse Professional Identities

* What titles do holders of these qualifications give to their work and their profession?
* Primary school: teaching and teachers
* Early Childhood settings: early childhood education, early childhood education and care; childcare;
* Early years workers, early years professionals, early years practitioners, early educators
* Professional/trade union organisations: INTO and Association of Childcare Professionals
Diverse Research in Early Childhood Education

* Student research at BA, MA and Ph.D. levels
* Funded research
* Independent research by lectures and researchers
* Very little crossing of boundaries to date
* Little collaborative research
* Sometimes separate conferences
* Often separate publications
* Strong North-South divide
Starting Points for Alignment

* Current research tends to correlate with boundaries for children but opportunities exist at borders
* Transition studies
* Early Start classrooms
* School readiness studies
* Early years curricular developments: Aistear, Primary School curriculum
* Evaluation studies of interventions
* Valuable and also constrained by funding parameters
Recent Publications

- NCCA curriculum development, involving both ECE and Primary school experts
- Shows need to develop continuous pedagogy as children move from one setting to another
- Parity of esteem, not downward pressure (Halpern 2013)
- Implications for lecturers: need to be more familiar with the philosophy and pedagogy of the “other”
Traditionally third level academic work has involved teaching, research and civic engagement

ECE courses have a history of strong student support academically and socially

Recent trends include greater accountability and resultant administration and bureaucracy

What is the optimum balance between teaching, student support, administration and research?
Immediate opportunities

* Academics have a degree of choice of research focus
* Could we work more collaboratively with our own colleagues and those in other colleges to obtain critical mass, especially in regard to funding?
* Can we optimise the opportunities that student research presents, particularly at masters level?
* Potential of grouped dissertations on themes/topics as is the case in other disciplines (similar to some funded projects)
* Opportunities in traditional and technological universities
How can we continue with existing valuable work and also work on more theoretical concepts/ideas and more longitudinal work across the age range?

* Academics and Researchers need time and space
* Medium and long-term planning
* CECDE type and Irish Research Council scholarships
* Sabbaticals from Higher Education Institutions
* Do we want to do this? If so, how can we go about it?
With growing interest in investing and supporting early childhood, there will be more research and attention to how we provide for all our children in a way that maximises their potential (Hayes 2008).

We have some starting points to develop continuity and critical mass

How can we maximise the potential of research into early childhood education for the benefit of children?
