A research project examining:

‘Influences of third level education on professional practice in the Early Year’s sector.’

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Early Years Care and Education

Submitted: 24th March 2017
Word count: 4,585 words
Declaration

I declare that this dissertation and the research involved in it are entirely the work of the author.

Signature: __________________________     Date: __________________

Edelle Collins
Abstract

This project investigates the influences of third level education on the professional practice of students partaking in B.A in Early Years Care and Education course in Athlone Institute of Technology. It attempts to explore the advantages and limitations of obtaining a third level education on professional practices in the early years setting.

Aims and objectives are proposed, relevant literature examined and methodology introduced. A questionnaire is used as the data gathering instrument.

Improved professional practices and relationships were found to promote better outcomes for children. However, participants reported a lack in salary increases to reflect level of education and government investment as a restriction of engaging in higher education.

Recommendations regarding increased government investment, further in-service training, and development of a union are made to improve the sector.
Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following people for their support and encouragement throughout the completion of this research:

- The supervising lecturer Dr. Vincent O’ Connor for his patience, support and guidance throughout the undertaking and completion of this project.

- The lecturing staff of the Early Years Care and Education course especially, Arlene Naughton, Caroline Coyle, John Harding, Pat Hannon, Nuala Rowland, Lesley Hernandez, Johnny O’Rourke and Mary Rose Keane for sharing their expertise and knowledge over the course of my study.

- The Library staff of AIT for their invaluable help, advice and direction.

- The participants of this project for their time and contribution of knowledge in the completion of the research.

- My partner, family and friends for their support and encouragement throughout this research project.

- To my fellow students for their never-ending advice, assistance, encouragement, and friendship during the course.
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Chapter 1

Introduction
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project is to explore the views of AIT students on the influences of third level education on their professional practice in early years. The main objectives are to identify advantages and limitations of obtaining a third level education on their professional practice.

Chapter two examines relevant literature between 1962 – 2016 on the correlation of practitioner educational level and professional practices. Questionnaires were used as the data gathering instrument and this, along with the methodology is discussed in chapter three. The results of the research are presented in chapter four using narrative form and illustrated by graphs. The results are discussed in chapter five with references to literature outlined in chapter two. Finally, recommendations and a conclusion are outlined in chapter six.
Chapter 2

Literature Review
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine current research available on the influences that third level education has on professional practice within early years’ settings. The review opens with a brief history on early childhood education in Ireland and a definition of professional practice.

It will draw mainly on national and international perspectives from the U.S.A and the UK between 1962 and 2016 with an objective to obtaining an insight into the advantages and limitations which third level education has on professional practice. The review concludes with a justification for the need to conduct the research.

2.2 History of Early Childhood Education in Ireland

The traditional role of women in Ireland was in the home. Governments in the 1920’s and 1930’s deprived women on several of their rights, most notably the 1932 marriage bar which required women national school teachers to retire once they married, later extending to the whole of the Civil Service (Valiulis, 2012). This led to the majority of childcare being catered for within the home or by family members and negated the need for preschool education. The rise in economic growth and an increase of female participation in the labour market by mid-1990, gave rise to the demand for early education in Ireland (Corrigan, 2004). The provision of early education remained unregulated until the introduction of the Childcare (Preschool Services) Regulations 1996 and their amendment in 2006. However, no stipulation was made regarding workers to obtain a qualification until the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) regulations (2016), which state employees working directly with children must hold a minimum qualification equivalent to level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework.
2.3 Professional practice definition

Siolta (2006) defines professional practice as individuals having knowledge, skills, values and attitudes appropriate to their role in the early years’ setting, which is supported through being reflective on practice and engaging in ongoing professional development.

2.4 Advantages of third level education on professional practice.

Much research carried out on the influences of early years’ practitioners who have obtained a third level education in early childhood, shows that it yields long term benefits for children. Hayes (2007) adopts secondary research to declare that a well-educated workforce working directly with children, will enhance the quality of early learning experiences for children and will ultimately benefit everybody.

Pobal (2015) released their Annual Early Years Sector Survey report for 2014. 64% of participants responded, both from private and community services. It reveals, the proportion of staff with no accredited training remains on average 10%. In total, 87% of staff are qualified to level 5 or higher (unchanged from 2012), 50% are qualified to level 6 or higher, and 15% to level 7 (up from 12% in 2012). This is in comparison with 30% of practitioners in Finland and 60% in Denmark who hold a three-year degree, (Start Strong, 2012).

In an international context, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program, 1962 – 1967 was a preschool education program which offered classes for 2.5 hours per day, focused on children from low income families. They identified a sample of 123 low-income African-American children who were assessed to be at high risk of school failure. 58 were assigned to a program group that received a high-quality preschool program at ages 3 and 4 and 65 to another group that received no preschool program. The program ran for 2 years, by professionals who held a Bachelor’s degree. The methodology used, collected data annually on both groups from ages 3 through 11 and again at ages 14, 15, 19, 27, and 40.

In recent research, Schweinhart et. al (2005) examined the results of the 40-year-old group. Results displayed that children in the program group out preformed the children in the no program group. The results stated 76% vs 62% were employed at 40. 37% vs 28% owned their own home and 82% vs 62% owned their own car. A reduction in arrests for crimes of
violence and drugs and in jail sentences is evident in the participant’s lifetime, to the age of 40. Similarly, to other research carried out, the study concludes one of the key influences was the education level of the teachers.

Several Irish publications refer to the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project. This was the first major European longitudinal study of a national sample of young children’s development between the ages of 3 and 7 years old (Sylva et. Al 2004). The methodology used incorporated 3,000 children, their parents, their home environments, and the pre-school settings they attended. A control group of children who had no experience of a preschool setting was used to ensure a fair comparison. The results obtained conveyed that settings which have staff with higher qualifications show higher quality and the children gain better progress thus remaining compatible to other studies.

Neuman and Cunningham (2009) conducted a study with 304 childcare centres to examine the impact of professional development on teacher knowledge and quality literacy and language practices. Results showed that teachers who undertook the professional development course and coaching scored significantly higher on the quality of their early language and literacy practices. This contrasts with Early et al. (2007), after seven studies were carried out to determine quality and children’s outcomes from the educational attainment of practitioners. The findings indicate that increasing the education of practitioners will not improve classroom quality or maximise academic outcomes for children and therefore focus should be towards interactions between practitioners and the child.

NICHD undertook a study on the effects of the workforce on child development (NICHD, 2006, cited in National Academy Press, 2012: p. 40 - 42). The study adopted an impressive methodology by following 1,364 children from different locations and backgrounds who were in childcare for more than 10 hours per week. They were observed at different ages such as 6, 15, 24, 36 and 54 months old. Data collected included minute by minute documentation of the child’s experiences and on practitioners such as training and education, wellbeing, beliefs and attitudes and reasons for becoming childcare workers. Results obtained by Hueston for children aged 3 and 4.5 years old, education and training of the practitioner provided for school readiness, high language comprehension and low level of behaviour
problems and the development of social and cognitive competencies. In contrast, for infants and 2 year olds, higher quality was observed when factors such as low child to adult ratio, small group size and a high quality physical environment were in place.

Recent research carried out by Start Right Limerick (2014) facilitated to link early years’ services for support and sharing of information and increase professional development. Results displayed a rise in engagement with outside agencies, other professionals, parents, children and families leading to better quality services.

2.5 Limitations of third level education on professional practice.

Based on informed opinions that children’s learning and development is dependent on the qualifications of their teachers, Barnett (2003) examined the relationship between the achievements of preschool children and the qualification of the early years’ professionals. Whilst he remains supportive of a degree led workforce, he identifies limits to recruiting quality teachers as poor pay and lack of other benefits.

Similarly, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) have found through secondary research, a strong relationship between staff wages and quality childcare. It reveals US childcare workers earn considerably less than kindergarten teachers and bus drivers. Wages do not correspond with the rate of inflation or reflect levels of education resulting in high turnover of staff.

Moloney, M. and Pope, J. (2015) conducted a study which explores graduate’s experiences regarding their experiences of working within the ECCE sector between 2007 and 2010. A low response rate of 38.3 % responded by completing the online questionnaire. The results correlate with views from Barnett, Shonkoff and Phillips and displayed poor salaries, lack of professional status with some respondents furthering their education to leave the sector.

An OECD report (2006) states that the government fears rise in qualifications will put a demand on them for further investment. Children’s Rights Alliance (2016) has reported Irish government invests a minimal 0.2% of annual GDP into the early childhood sector. Lack of government investment plays a role in limiting high quality professional practice.
OECD (2012) suggest that in-service training is considered beneficial for educating young children. This corresponds with the DES (2016) survey of early years’ practitioners which indicated that 91% of respondents would welcome further additional on the job training. Additional on the job training includes workshops, conferences, presentations, discussions, and tutorials which impart information and knowledge with attempt to effect professional practice in a positive manner, (Sheridan et al. 2009).

2.6 Conclusion

This research proposes to explore the views of AIT students on the influences of third level education on their professional practice within the early years’ setting. From the research currently examined, it is possible to conclude that obtaining such a degree in this field will improve professional practices, leading to many positive outcomes for children. However, it conveys that other factors such as salary are equally influential.

Subsequently, after examining many pieces of research, it has exposed a demanding need to conduct this study. It is evident, research is mainly based in the UK and USA and more research is required in Ireland. A study of this nature has not previously been conducted with AIT students and therefore, will contribute to the knowledge surrounding educational levels of practitioners and quality professional practices.
Chapter 3

Methodology
Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this research project is to explore influences of third level education on professional practice in the early years’ sector. Section two outlines the method of research used, which is most appropriate to satisfy the two objectives; advantages and limitations of third level education on professional practice in the early years’ setting. The procedure and process followed in the research are outlined in section 3.3. Section 3.4 examines the sample group chosen, while ethical issues, limitations and data analysis are discussed in the following sections.

3.2 Research Method

There are two main methodological approaches for conducting research, qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It uses interviews and focus groups to gather relevant information. Quantitative research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into useable statistics through questionnaires; (Wyse, 2011).

This research will adopt a quantitative method. The objectives require acquisition of a large amount of information which cannot be obtained using interviews or focus group methods. Therefore, questionnaires are considered the best method to satisfy the objectives.

The pilot questionnaire was aligned to the objectives. Questions 1 – 4 used demographic questions to gather general information about the participants’ age, gender, qualification level and whether they undertook a full-time or part time degree course. Questions 5 – 9 gather information in relation to objective one and questions 10 – 16 gathers information required to satisfy objective two. A variety of rating scale and rank order scaling questions were utilised throughout the questionnaire to ensure data obtained could be quantified into statistics.
3.3 Procedure and Process

A pilot questionnaire was drawn up and circulated to four people, not associated with the study, to provide critical feedback on layout, wording and appropriateness of questions and usefulness of potential data gathered from the questions. Feedback received was applied to the questionnaire before presenting it to the supervisor for approval.

The participants were contacted by email which outlined the reason for conducting the study through a letter of consent. On receiving letters of consent from 20 participants, the final questionnaire was then administered via email.

The pilot study helped to ensure that questions were neutral and removed any forms of bias.

3.4 Participants

A total of 20 students from Athlone Institute of Technology, who have obtained a minimum level 7 degree in Early Childhood Care and Education, participated in the study. All participants currently work in the sector and therefore, will be able to identify how their education and training has influenced their practice and to establish limitations, if applicable. For this reason, this sample group was considered the most appropriate to satisfy the aim and objectives of the study.

Course rules stipulated a minimum of 20 participants. The participants were requested to read and sign a letter of consent prior to partaking in the study and were subsequently presented with the questionnaire to complete.

3.5 Ethical Issues

Consideration of ethics was a constant feature throughout the study. Participants were informed of confidentiality, anonymity, and ability to withdraw from the study at any time through the letter of consent and in the body of the email administered to all participants. The participants were informed how the data would be analysed, presented and destroyed following the completion of the study.
3.6 Limitations

The study sought to explore the views of students who have obtained a third level education. A limitation of this omits practitioners who have completed courses equal to level 5 and 6 on the national framework of qualifications whose professional practice may have been influenced as a result of undertaking training at this level.

3.7 Proposed method of data analysis

The data gathered were analysed statistically and presented both narratively and through graphs. About 50% of the questions were illustrated using charts to further enhance the understanding of the results.
Chapter 4

Results
Chapter 4
Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of results. The demographic information gathered by the questionnaires is presented in the initial paragraph. This is followed by statistical data, presented in narrative and graphical form, relating to objective one and two. The course requirement stipulated a minimum of 20 questionnaires and 100% response rate has been achieved. All questionnaires provided valid information.

4.2 General Information

Participants were 95% female and 5% male. The most prevalent age group was 35 years and older (55%) followed by 30% aged 31 – 34 years, 10% aged 26 – 30 years and 21 – 25 years at 5%. 80% retain a level 7 ordinary degree, 15%, a level 8 higher degree and 5%, a level 9 masters. 15% of respondents attended a full-time degree course prior to working in the sector and 85% engaged in a part-time degree course while working full time within the sector.

4.3 Advantages of third level education on early years’ professional practice.

Education influential on practice

85% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed and 15% agreed that their education has positively influenced their professional practice.

Areas of Early Education practice

As conveyed in figure 4.3.1 below, 30% of respondents believed their education assisted them in linking theory to practice, while 20% equally said the ability to develop and plan a curriculum and to conduct observations on children. 15% noted child development, while 10% chose implementation of Siolta and 5% Aistear.
Informing professional practice on legislation

55% of respondents agreed their training assisted them in the implementation of the Childcare Preschool Regulations. 15% reported it helped them gain knowledge of National Preschool Standards while 10% stated health promotion and 10% fire safety legislation. The remaining 10% spread equally for health and safety regulations and employment legislation.

Professional relationships within the sector.

As displayed in figure 4.3.2 below, 45% of respondents found education beneficial to building and maintaining relationships with children in their care. 25% indicated that it supported effective communication with parents and families, liaising with other agencies such as Tusla and DES (15%) while building a rapport with other early years professionals was indicated by 10%. Building relationships with colleagues in the same service (5%) while nobody felt it assisted them to become more knowledgeable about family backgrounds and traditions.
Figure 4.3.2: Professional relationships within the sector.

<table>
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<th>Ability to build and maintain relationships with children</th>
<th>More knowledgeable about family backgrounds and traditions</th>
<th>Capability to communicate with parents</th>
<th>Ability to build relationship with colleagues</th>
<th>Liaise with other practitioners in the sector</th>
<th>Liaise with outside agencies e.g. Tulsa</th>
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**Personal professional practice.**

35% agreed education made them aware of their own values and beliefs, while 25% said it enhanced their awareness of the role of the adult. 20% of respondents felt it assisted them in the development of skills and qualities to enhance children’s learning and development and 15% noted it has encouraged them to become more reflective on their own practice while 5% chose other.

**4.4 Limitations of third level education on early years’ professional practice.**

A statement was sought to determine to what extent practitioners agreed or disagreed that upgrading of the workforce required more than upgrading of practitioner’s qualifications. As illustrated in figure 4.4.1, 55% strongly agreed, while 40% agreed and 5% remained neutral.
The following three questions were designed to determine what level of education did practitioners agree or disagree is required to effect professional practice:

**Ordinary degree level 7 necessary to educate and effect professional practice.**

75% of respondents strongly agreed and 25% agreed.

**Higher degree level 8 necessary to educate and effect professional practice.**

As shown in figure 4.4.2, 65% strongly agreed, 25% agreed and 10% remained neutral.
Figure 4.4.2: Higher degree level 8

Level 9 Masters necessary to educate and effect professional practice.

As conveyed in figure 4.4.3, 15% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 25% were neutral and 35% disagreed.

Figure 4.4.3: Level 9 Masters
Additional factors to ensure a high quality early years professional.

45% noted that attitudes and beliefs of a person ensured a high quality early years professional. 25% agreed that enthusiasm for the role is necessary, while 15% reported that experience of the sector was required. 10% noted communication skills and 5% patience and humour as being important. The option of no additional factors is required to ensure a high quality early years’ professional remained blank by 100% of respondents.

Restrictions of obtaining a third level degree

As illustrated in figure 4.4.4, 45% of respondents said that the lack of salary increases to reflect training was a restriction of education, while 35% noted the lack of government investment in the sector as a reason. Other options such as lack of professionalism of the sector, no room for promotion with the service, poor working conditions and highly qualified professional leaving the sector were answered by 5% of respondents equally.

Figure 4.4.4: Restrictions of obtaining a third level degree
Value of additional on the job training.

This question was asked to determine if practitioners valued on the job training in addition to their third level education. As presented in figure 4.4.5, 55% strongly agreed, 40% agreed and 5% remained neutral.

Figure 4.4.5: Value of additional on the job training.
Chapter 5

Discussion
Chapter 5
Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the significance of the results. The objectives will form the relevant headings and the results relating to the objectives are discussed in detail. To emphasise the importance of the results, the findings will be compared and related to the findings of others which are discussed in the literature review.

An evaluation of the method is contained in section 5.3, while a conclusion is outlined in section 5.4.

5.2 Objective 1: Advantages of third level education on early years’ professional practice.

Early et al. (2007) discovered little relationship between an early years’ practitioners educational level and outcomes for children. In comparison, Neuman and Cunningham (2009) found strong evidence that practice based professional development had an improved outcome on the quality of practitioner’s language and early literacy practices.

These results are important as they correspond with the current study, which has indicated that all participants observed improved outcomes in areas of early childhood care and education practices. Results showed majority of respondents (30%) said it assisted them in linking theory to practice. Thus, this conflicts with Early et al. (2007) who argued there was no conclusive evidence which demonstrated that a practitioner with a Bachelor’s degree or any other level of education will ensure a high-quality setting or improve children’s learning and development. Further research is warranted into the areas of early childhood care and education which improve as a result of a practitioner holding a degree level qualification.

Siolta (2006) describes relationships among all stakeholders within the sector as essential. Relationships include the child, adults, peers, family and the extended community, which are secure, responsive and respectful and provide consistency and continuity over time. A case study conducted by Start Right Limerick (2014) aided to link early year’s services for support,
sharing of information and professional development. Although training was informal, it facilitated a rise in engaging with outside agencies, other professionals, parents, children and families.

Similarities have been drawn with the participants in this study, with the majority (45%) found engagement in training beneficial to building and maintaining relationships with children in their care. A limitation was identified in the case study as it only considered community services in one area of Limerick. Further research may be conducted to gain views from both private and community services, nationwide, on the benefits of engaging in professional development.

5.3 Objective 2: Limitations of third level education on early years’ professional practice.

NICHDs’ model of external quality standards such as low adult/child ratios, small groups and high quality environments speculate that they had stronger relations to the outcomes for children, than formal education and training of caregivers (NICHD, 2006, cited in National Academy Press, 2012: p. 40 - 42). This study suggests a similarity, as 55% of respondents strongly agree, that practitioners overwhelmingly believe that work conditions and environments must be improved in conjunction with upgrading the qualifications of the workforce to enhance professional practice.

These results support research conducted by Shonkoff and Phillips (2000). They found that the work of early years’ practitioners is not only influenced by their level of education but also through a range of external factors to include the environment, salary and other benefits. 45% of participants in this study indicated that the lack of a salary increase to reflect educational level was a limitation to engaging in higher levels of education in the early year’s sector.

Therefore, correlations can be identified in this study and research carried out by Maloney and Pope (2015). Although they identified a consistent growth of enrolments in level 7 and level 8 degrees, it was established that wages are low and impacts quality and prevents qualified practitioners from engaging in work within the sector and results in high rates of turnover of staff leaving the sector in search of better careers.
Additionally, 35% of respondents demonstrated that the lack of government investment into the sector has a negative impact on practitioners obtaining higher level of qualifications. OECD (2006) suggests that governments fear funding consequences of rising staff qualifications as it will demand a rise in wages and significantly increase the cost of services. This may indicate the current low rate of government spending on childcare, which is in the region of 0.2%, (Children’s Rights Alliance Report Card, 2016).

The clear majority of respondents strongly agreed (55%) and 40% agreed that additional on the job training was valuable to their professional practice. This figure is important, as it is comparable to the 91% of participants who took part in the Survey of Early Years Practitioners (DES, 2016) who indicated that they would like more opportunities to be made available for on the job training.

Similarly, the OECD report (2012) argues that in-service training is considered beneficial as educating young children requires specialised skills and knowledge on a variety of developmental areas. It is plausible to suggest that greater access to in-service training opportunities would significantly improve professional practice in the early years’ sector as it is a continuum of change in quality and effective practices.

5.4 Evaluation of method

Questionnaires were used as the data gathering instrument in this study. It was an effective tool which gathered the information needed to satisfy the aim and objectives of the research. The letter of consent and the questionnaire were distributed to the participants via email, which was found to be very cost and time effective.

Feedback from participants indicated that the questionnaire contained questions of relevance, ensuring it was clear and effortless to answer. Therefore, this allowed for the 20 questionnaires, stipulated in the course rules, to be easily obtained.

100% of respondents are engaged in work in the early year’s sector. While honesty cannot be assured, this may suggest that the information complied is true and demonstrates a reliable reflection of the current status within the sector.
A limitation became apparent in question 14, which required additional factors to ensure a high-quality practitioner to be ranked in order of importance from 1 to 6. Many respondents felt all options were equally important and validated a 6 as most important. This suggests, that perhaps the question should have been asked using a different format. However, this did not detract from the quality of the information obtained.

5.5 Conclusion

The study has exhibited that practitioners who engage in third level education in early years’ care and education provides improved professional practices and outcomes for children. Although, limitations to engaging in higher levels of education have been identified such as salaries and government investment, it has not detracted from an increase in individuals enrolling in such courses and eager to engage in further in-service training to keep abreast of changes within the sector.

This study has highlighted a need for further research in Ireland to identify the benefits of engaging in third level education on professional practices within the early years’ sector. Results obtained may lead to an increase in the number of entrants into such courses and lead Ireland towards a graduate led workforce. It may have a knock-on effect and lead to increased government investment to retain qualified practitioners to ensure future citizens are competent and confident individuals.
Chapter 6

Conclusion
And
Recommendations
Chapter 6
Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to explore the views of AIT Early Years Care and Education students on how third level education influences professional practice in the early years’ sector. The results of the study indicated that there is evidence to suggest that obtaining a level 7 ordinary degree or higher in early years’ will have a positive impact on professional practice and on outcomes for children.

However, it also highlighted limitations such as the lack of an increase in salaries post obtaining such high levels of education. If the Irish government do not increase funding into the early year’s sector, practitioners with degrees will leave the sector in search of better careers which is highlighted by research. Therefore, Ireland will not reach the recommended workforce level of 60% with degrees in the sector and thus, will have detrimental effects on the learning and development of children.

6.2 Recommendations

The study has identified a number of recommendations to aid in the development of the early year’s sector.

Recommendations identified include:

1. a rise in government investment which focuses on staff qualifications and training
2. increased opportunities for in-service training and workshops
3. development of a union to improve pay and working conditions for the sector.
Reference List


Appendices
Appendix 1

Covering letter issues to all respondents

Dear Participant

My name is Edelle Collins. I am a final year student at Athlone Institute of Technology completing a BA (Hons) in Early Years Care and Education. As part of my course, I must complete a research project. I have chosen to explore the influences of third level education on professional practice in early years. The cohort chosen to aid in the research are students of Early Years Care and Education of Athlone Institute of Technology.

I will be using questionnaires as the data gathering instrument to gain an insight into the advantages and limitations of obtaining a third level education on professional practice in the early year’s sector.

I would be extremely grateful if you would participate in the research by completing a questionnaire. Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the research as any time, if you so wish.

The information gathered will be solely used for the research project. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants will be upheld at all times.

Once consent has been obtained for your participation, the questionnaire will be emailed to you, where you can complete and return by email. The questionnaire comprises of 16 short answer questions and should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Once the information has been collated, the questionnaires will be destroyed.

If you require any further information on my research project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your time and assistance.

Yours sincerely

Edelle Collins
Appendix 2

Pilot Questionnaire

How 3rd level education influences professional practice.

Please attempt to answer all questions.

Q1. Please tick the appropriate box which best represents your age.
   - 21 – 25
   - 26 – 30
   - 31 – 35
   - 35 +

Q2. What gender are you?
   - Female
   - Male

Q3. What is your highest level of qualification to date?
   - Level 7 Ordinary degree
   - Level 8 Higher degree
   - Level 9 Masters

Objective 1: To identify the advantages of 3rd level education on professional practice

Q4. Please identify by ticking the appropriate box which statement best describes your training history.
   - I attended a full-time degree level course prior to working in the early year’s sector.
   - I attended a part time degree level course while continuing to work within the early year’s sector.

Q5. How do you feel your training developed your professional practice within the early years?
   - Very well
   - Well
   - Not very well
   - Not at all
Q6. What areas of Early Education did your training assist in developing your professional practice. Number in order of importance.

- Child Development
- Implementation of Aistear
- Implementation of Siolta
- Ability to develop and plan a curriculum
- Ability to observe children and document their interests
- Ability to link theory to practice

Q7. What areas of legislation did your training assist in developing your professional practice?
Number in order of importance.

- Implementation of the Childcare Preschool Regulations
- Knowledge of National Preschool Standards
- Knowledge of Health and Safety Regulations
- Knowledge of Health promotion in preschool (i.e. healthy eating)
- Employment Legislation
- Fire Safety Legislation

Q8. How did your training aid you in developing professional relationships within the Early Years Sector? Number in order of importance.

- Ability to build and maintain a relationship with children in your care
- Be more knowledgeable about family backgrounds, traditions, and customs.
- Capability to communicate effectively with parents and families
- Ability to build relationship with colleagues in the same service.
- To liaise and build a rapport with other early years professionals in the sector.
- To liaise with other agencies to include County Childcare Committee, Tusla, Pobal and DES.

Q9. What personal traits did your training assist in developing your professional practice.
Number in order of importance.

- Awareness of own values and beliefs and how they can influence your practice.
- Awareness of role of the adult in early years.
- Become reflective on own practice and how it can be adapted.
- Further development of skills and qualities to enhance children’s learning and development.
- Identify further training opportunities you would like to pursue.
Objective 2: To identify the limitations of 3rd level education on professional practice.

Q10: To what extent do you agree with this statement.

“We should move beyond a focus on whether the lead teacher has a B.A. to a focus on the content and quality of the higher education program.”

Strongly agree □  Agree □  Neutral □  Disagree □  Strongly Disagree □

Q11: Do you agree that qualifications alone make a good early year’s professional?

Strongly agree □  Agree □  Neutral □  Disagree □  Strongly Disagree □

Q12: What other factors ensure a high quality early years professional. Number in order of importance.

Attitudes and beliefs of the person. ___
Experience of working with young children. ___
Patience and Humour. ___
Enthusiasm for the role. ___
Flexibility. ___
Communication skills. ___

Q13: What do you think are areas of detriment on obtaining a 3rd level education in early years. Please list in order.

Lack of professionalism of the sector. ___
No room for promotion within the service. ___
No increase in salaries to reflect your training. ___
Lack of better working conditions. ___
Highly qualified professionals leaving the sector. ___

Q14: Do you value on the job training as an addition to your 3rd level education.

Strongly agree □  Agree □  Neutral □  Disagree □  Strongly Disagree □
Appendix 3

Questionnaire

An exploration on how third level education influences professional practice in the early year’s sector.

Please attempt to answer all questions.

Q1. Please tick the appropriate box which best represents your age.
   21 – 25 years □  26 – 30 years □  31 – 34 years □  35 years + □

Q2. What gender are you?
   Female □  Male □

Q3. What is your highest level of qualification to date?
   Level 7 Ordinary degree □  Level 8 Higher degree □  Level 9 Masters □

Q4. Please identify by ticking the appropriate box which statement best describes your training history.
   I attended a full-time degree course prior to working in the early year’s sector. □
   I attended a part time degree course while continuing to work within the early year’s sector. □

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your training has positively influenced your professional practice within the early year’s sector?
   Strongly agree □  Agree □  Neutral □  Disagree □  Strongly Disagree □

Q6. In what areas of Early Education, did training assist in developing your professional practice. Number in order of importance (1 is the least important and 6 is the most important).
   - Child Development □
   - Implementation of Aistear □
   - Implementation of Siolta □
   - Ability to develop and plan a curriculum □
   - Ability to observe children and document their interests □
   - Ability to link theory to practice □
Q7. In what areas of legislation, did training assist in informing your professional practice? Number in order of importance (1 is the least important and 6 is the most important).

- Implementation of the Childcare Preschool Regulations ___
- Knowledge of National Preschool Standards ___
- Knowledge of Health and Safety Regulations ___
- Knowledge of Health promotion in preschool (ie healthy eating) ___
- Employment Legislation ___
- Fire Safety Legislation ___

Q8. How did training assist you in developing professional relationships within the Early Years Sector? Number in order of importance (1 is the least important and 6 is the most important).

- Ability to build and maintain a relationship with children in your care ___
- More knowledgeable about family backgrounds, traditions, and customs. ___
- Capability to communicate effectively with parents and families ___
- Ability to build relationship with colleagues in the same service. ___
- To liaise and build a rapport with other early years professionals in the sector. ___
- To liaise with other agencies to include Childcare Committee, Tusla, DES and Pobal. ___

Q9. How did training influence your own personal professional practice? Number in order of importance (1 is the least important and 6 is the most important).

- Awareness of own values and beliefs and how they can influence your practice. ___
- Awareness of role of the adult in early years. ___
- Become reflective on own practice and how it can be adapted. ___
- Development of skills and qualities to enhance children’s learning and development. ___
- Identify further training opportunities you would like to pursue. ___
- Other (Please Specify) _________________________________ ___

Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement.

“If we are really thinking about attempts to upgrade the workforce, then it involves upgrading the environments in which people work, as well as upgrading their skills.”

Strongly agree □ Agree □ Neutral □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □

Q11: To what extent do you agree or disagree that Ordinary degree qualifications are necessary to educate and effect professional practice.

Strongly agree □ Agree □ Neutral □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree □
Q12: To what extent do you agree or disagree that Higher degree qualifications are necessary to educate and effect professional practice.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Q13: To what extent do you agree or disagree that a Master’s degree qualification is necessary to educate and effect professional practice.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Q14: What additional factors ensure a high quality early years professional. Number in order of importance (1 is the least important and 6 is the most important).

- Attitudes and beliefs of the person.
- Experience of working with young children.
- Patience and Humour.
- Enthusiasm for the role.
- Communication skills.
- No additional factors are required

Q15: What do you think are restrictions of being compelled to having a third level degree in the early year’s sector. Number in order of importance (1 is the least important and 6 is the most important).

- Lack of professionalism of the sector.
- No room for promotion within the service.
- No salary increases to reflect training.
- Poor working conditions.
- Highly qualified professionals leaving the sector.
- Lack of government investment in the sector

Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree that additional on the job training is valuable to your ability to practice in the early year’s sector.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly Disagree