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A lasting Legacy: Higher Education and Work-based Learning Making a Difference in Early Years

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# 'A lasting Legacy': Higher Education and Work-based Learning Making a Difference in Early Years



Inspiring tomorrow's professionals



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# Introduction



- I am the course leader for the Fd A Early Years a part time course designed to meet the needs of practitioners working with children 0-5 yrs.
- Overwhelming majority of students are white working class females, over 21, with very variable levels of qualification on entry- '*non-traditional*' students

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# Background to the study



- As part of the final module students complete a reflective account which focuses on their academic, personal and professional journeys.
- It was apparent from these initial reflective accounts that specific aspects of the course were impacting profoundly on their professional development.

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# Theoretical perspective



- *“There is now a clear expectation for early years practitioners to carefully consider and reflect upon the way they engage with children and families”* (Reed and Canning 2010)
- WBL is fundamental to this process-the main feature is *‘the ability to reflect on your skills, knowledge and approach to your work’* (Durrant et al 2008)

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# Work based learning



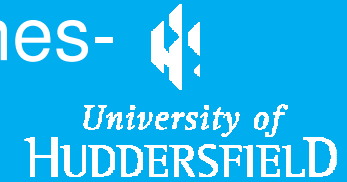
- WBL is more than work place learning, by linking with HE the practitioner can explore the relationship between theory and practice, the '*praxis*' (Appleby 2010)
- And interpersonal, interprofessional, intellectual and practical skills are developed through reflection and application in the workplace (Rawlings 2008)

- Qualitative study which emerged from student's narrative accounts
- Students agreed to take part in the study so at the initial stage produced 23 reflective accounts. (Summer 2009)
- The students/participants then agreed to get a statement from their employers describing how the Fd had impacted on their practice and the setting. Produced 10 statements (autumn/winter 2009)

- Whilst documentary evidence from students and employers provided insight into impact on the individual and their setting-I also wanted to get a better understanding of the impact on the wider workforce.
- Semi-structured interview with LA officer with responsibility for workforce development and training.



# Data analysis-findings and emerging themes- students



- Return to Rawlings to help categorise emerging themes (interpersonal, interprofessional, intellectual and practical skills) Also like to add Intergenerational
  - Interpersonal and interprofessional:
    - Communication and confidence –better report writing, more confident with parents and colleagues, new opportunities for leading groups and discussing professional aspirations, transferred to multiagency work
    - One student described herself as “*having a voice*”

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# Students cont'd



- **Intellectual:** (particular modules and their content highlighted as significant in developing practice and provision)
  - WBP (Reflection):-significant improvements in the setting (role play, outdoor area, more inviting environment for families)
  - Child development:
    - understand real value of play
    - Importance of the family and attachment theory(implemented key person system in school)
    - Emotional development (helped a child with behavioural difficulties)
  - Legislation: safeguarding , writing policies, seeing the bigger picture, helped deal with change

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# Students cont'd.



- Practical:
  - Observation and assessment (improved planning, evaluated in more depth, help parents)
  - ICT
  - Looking for other jobs/educational opportunities
  - Time management and organisation *“the pressure to be organised helped me be organised at work”*
  - Role model to other staff
  - Renewed enthusiasm *“felt proud”*

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# Students cont'd



## Intergenerational:

- impact on the educational attitudes, dispositions and outcomes of children in their care
- impact on their own children- improvements in behaviour, raising aspirations “*can we go to the library mum*”

- Interpersonal and interprofessional:
  - Communication and confidence *‘engaged in mutually valuable communication’*
  - *“demonstrated her professionalism in the way in which she has considered and shared her learning with us”*
  - *“S brought new information...to help develop other staff members’*
  - *“We have had an opportunity to try new ideas and activities that we may not have thought of”*

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# Employers contd



## Intellectual:

*Reflection: “I can see how she has taken time to think about how what she is learning affects her role as a practitioner within the setting. This ultimately benefits other staff, children and parents too.”*

WBP-very real specific benefits, research described as ‘*invaluable*’, improved practice and the changes earned “*well deserved praise from all who use the service*”

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# Employers cont'd.



- Practical:
  - Role model for staff and children
  - Improved observation and assessment skills
  - Shapes policies and practice- “shares in collective responsibility for their implementation”
- Intergenerational:
  - Changes to provision which are sustainable and really making a difference (short term and longer term)
  - *“big impact on the curriculum and children’s learning”*

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# LA officer

- Pointed out that it can be difficult to identify with any accuracy if improvements in practice are due to someone studying, however she said enormous amounts of anecdotal evidence from employers, advisory teachers and students that WBL is really making a difference.
  - *“you notice that those on the Fd are always first to put down for any additional training”*
  - *“you can see the effect on the team sometimes even when the student has moved on or up. The team may be more powerful, they create a lasting legacy”*



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# It's not all rosy



- The LA officer did point out that one potential problem was “*all the good ones leaving*”
- The students also highlighted some issues
- “*I have increased responsibility now at work but have found this very difficult to balance with studies*”
- “*I want to change provision...staff resistant to change...makes me think the setting's not so great*”

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# conclusion



- We live in uncertain times, although one thing is certain there is much less money available to Universities, employers and possibly students. Everyone will want value for money.
- Work based learning which takes place through considered reflection and application of theory to practice, develops interpersonal, interprofessional, intellectual, practical and intergenerational skills. It has a ripple effect, the benefits are multi levelled and certainly value for money.

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# references



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