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From Nursery Nurse to emerging early years professional: an investigation into the changing professional identities of students undertaking the foundation degree in early years

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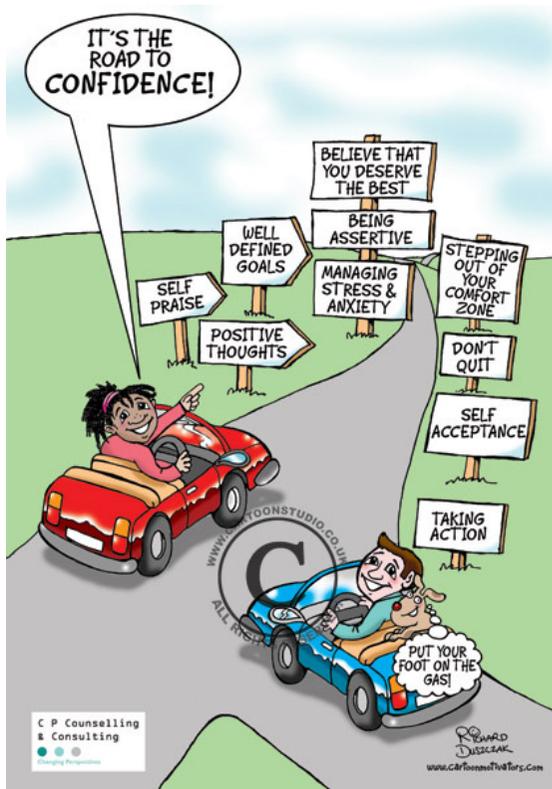
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From Nursery Nurse to emerging  
Early Years Professional: An  
investigation into the changing  
identities of students undertaking the  
Foundation Degree in Early Years

By Sharon Frankland

# The beginning of the road..

- From 'Just the Nursery Nurse'
- To confident Early Years Professional?



**HOW?**

# The Research Questions

- What is Personal and Professional Identity?
- How can Higher Education support Personal and Professional Identity?
- How have students undertaking the FdA in Early Years experienced changes to their identities?

# Supporting Literature

- Erikson, Freud and Mead – Identity changes throughout lifespan, influenced by internal and external factors
- Cultural influences impact on self identity and also how individual is viewed by others
- Early childhood experiences important in positive identity formation
- Identity may be strengthened when sharing similar traits to others (race, religion, culture etc)

# However..

- In post-modern society there is more opportunity to adopt individualistic approach (Giddens)
- Less evidence of 'the Grand Narrative' allowing a more 'pluralistic approach' (Lyotard)
- Current policy supports individuals to 'shape their own identity' via education

# Effects of HE on Identity

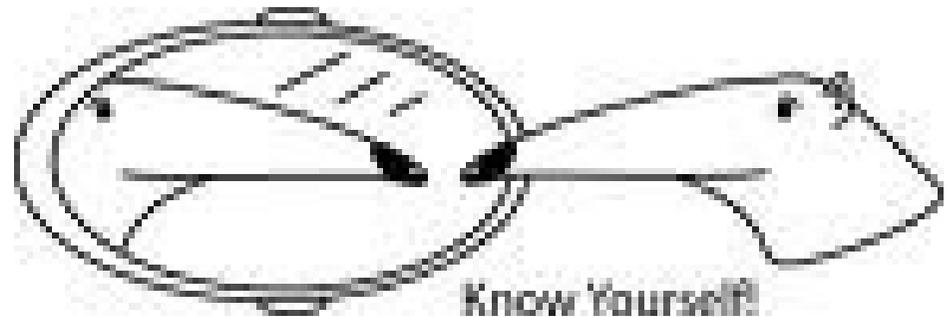
- Identity is affected by HE
- Positive impact on social and economic capital of society – also empowerment, personal growth and development
- Increase cultural capital of society therefore breaking down traditional class systems (Bourdieu)
- Women in particular can gain empowerment and break away from traditional domestic roles

# However.. It's not all positive

- Esteem can be threatened during transition into HE (confidence ↓)
- Education can cause threatened identities in terms of relationships with others i.e. 'changing habitus'
- Research by Britton and Baxter suggest most women continue to be responsible for majority of domestic responsibilities whilst studying

# Professional Identity

- Lack of professional Identity in Early Years – ambiguity in roles
  - Attempt by CWDC to raise esteem and profile of EYP's by introducing EYPS
  - Still some lack of commitment in terms of salaries and status
- Who am I?



# Methodology

- Life History
- Interpretivist approach
- In depth taped interviews
- Theoretical framework of social class, related to the 'widening participation' agenda and the current drive to up skill the workforce
- Although not generalisable, valuable information was gathered
- Thematic approach

# Research findings

- Both students gained benefits from their HE experience
- Both respondents feel more knowledgeable, but also more confident, articulate and more able to express their own opinions
- Both feel motivated to make positive changes affecting children's care learning and development
- Both feel they have developed a clearer 'vision of good practice' and feel able to lead others in developing this vision
- Both feel they have developed a greater sense of 'professionalism' as a result of the above

# Naomi – FdA and BA (Hons)

- *If I hadn't done the Foundation Degree I wouldn't have half the knowledge that I have got, being on the course has helped me to be much more confident and to know what good practice is...I think I have the drive and I would have the enthusiasm to go in and see what needs to be done.. I think I am ready for that!*

# Katherine

- *I can't wait to come back to Uni in September to start the BA. I'm so excited about coming back, I'm getting bored. I have started to think about everything in a totally different way since the FdA, I think it is because I have opened my world up – Uni has opened my world up!*

Other examples of positive identity  
development within students  
undertaking the FdA

# Christine (Childminder)



Barnsley child minder Christine Baker has become the first student to achieve an 'outstanding' OFSTED report for childcare in the Barnsley borough.

'Before I started the Foundation degree I was still quite nervous and apprehensive about my academic ability, but my tutors have been so supportive from the first day, helping me to structure my essays correctly and giving me great advice. Despite this, it was a bit of a shock to be the only student in the area awarded an 'outstanding' OFSTED report, but it's a great feeling and I feel I've worked hard to get here'

# Kerry (Lead Practitioner- Little Jo's)



- My aspirations for the future have changed due to doing this course. As I have gained confidence, I want so much more, I can possibly even see myself managing a Nursery now. I want to gain my Early Years Professional Status and who knows after that, I enjoy University so much, I may even continue to study. Although the work is hard at times, it's all worth it and got me to where I am today.

# Lynne – Children's Centre Manager

'The Foundation degree has given me the confidence and ability to move forward in my career from an Assistant Children's Centre Manager to Children's Centre Manager. It has provided me with a deeper understanding and knowledge base for working with young children and their families. My passion for the profession is strong and the FdA has reinforced this by making me a more reflective and forward thinking practitioner. The academic aspect of the course has enabled me to set targets for future development and has increased my thirst to continue in my learning journey to plan for my future career aspirations'

- Lynne Brooke- Children's Centre Manager



# Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that the FdA in Early Years;

- Can positively affect personal and professional identity
- Can give personal benefits such as improved confidence, self perception and can contribute to greater social and cultural capital
  
- In addition to this
- The Widening participation agenda can assist students from non traditional backgrounds to access HE by removing barriers such as distance and financial burdens
- The Current drive to up skill the Early Years workforce is supporting practitioners to believe that they are 'Not just the nursery Nurse' but are aspiring Early Years Professionals who are confident to take on the challenge of improving the outcomes for children in the Early Years

Thank you for listening

Any Questions?

# Key references

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