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‘An investigation into the effectiveness of training Foundation Phase Initial Teacher Training (ITT) students to implement ‘Special Me Time’ a targeted programme to support young children’s Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Emotional Literacy.’

A reflective paper detailing research undertaken as part of the award of Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD)

Abstract

This research focused specifically on the WAG (2008) Foundation Phase area of learning entitled: ‘Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity’. However, for the purpose of the study, the research will concentrate on the first part of this area namely, ‘Personal and Social Development and Well-Being’ (PSD/WB). The study aimed to examine and evaluate the experiences of two groups of ITT students, who facilitated and taught a targeted PSD/WB programme entitled ‘Special Me Time’ whilst on their teaching placements in a variety of Foundation Phase settings. The study also aimed to discover whether there was a need to equip students with additional specialised knowledge in relation to PSD/WB and Emotional literacy (EL) which they could then use to support and underpin their teaching.

The teaching experiences of four BA Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Year 3 students and eight PGCE ITT students were scrutinised. In addition, the study explored the rationale for the further development of good practice in PSD/WB/EL pedagogy in the School of Education of a large University and the associated implications, especially those relating to the self esteem confidence and EL of the students themselves whilst delivering and facilitating this dynamic.

The analysis of results highlighted that:

- Some students were initially unaware of the importance or value of supporting young children’s PSD/WB and EL.
- Some students were initially unaware of the link between young children’s feelings and their behaviour.
• Students felt that they needed to know more about PSD / WB and EL to be able to teach and support young children more effectively.
• Students felt that the PSD/WB training they had received should be compulsory to all students irrespective of their chosen age phase.
• Students felt that they needed to improve their own EL especially in relation to dealing with more emotive issues which occurred during the course of the trial.
• They saw a definite benefit from undertaking the ‘Special Me Time’ activities, although sometimes they found it difficult to effectively quantify the differences that the activities made.
• Students noted that children enjoyed doing the activities and in some cases, students noticed changes in the children, in relation to their confidence and general resilience.
• All students noted a positive change in their classroom management and the general well-being of the children.

The study concludes by recommending that further research should be conducted in this area. Further evaluation on the benefits of equipping all ITT students regardless of age specialism chosen, with skills and knowledge in relation to the teaching PSD/WB and facilitating young children’s EL would also be pertinent.

Introduction and background

Changes in early years education have been put in place in Wales, which has taken the principality further towards its goal of being a ‘Learning Country’. Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) first envisaged Wales as a ‘Learning Country’ in 2001. Changes in early years provision were set out which included improving standards and integrating education and care effectively (p15).

A publication by Estyn in 2002 entitled ‘Excellent Schools’ highlighted that schools needed to devote more attention to factors such as developing children’s attitudes for learning, as well as just teaching the basic facts and figures relating to topics or curriculum areas. The idea of developing ‘learning dispositions’ in young children was developed by Carr and Claxton (2002) in the New Zealand school system, they looked at the holistic aspects of the teaching process not just at the end results and ensuing league tables.

The broad and balanced curriculum that early years practitioners have been waiting for has arrived and is in the process of implementation, in the form of the Welsh Assembly Government Foundation Phase Framework (2008) which began statutory roll out in September 2008. Full completion of the roll out of this programme is anticipated to be July 2011. There are seven areas of learning:

• Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity
• Language, Literacy and Communication Skills
• Mathematical Development
Welsh Language Development
Knowledge and Understanding of the World
Physical Development
Creative Development

All areas of learning will be delivered through the medium of play and active discovery. The Framework will equip young children with a range of skills. Personal and Social Development, Well-Being and Cultural Diversity are seen as being at the ‘heart’ of the Foundation Phase.

Supporting children’s Personal and Social Development is vital in helping young children to establish their own identities. Self esteem is not fixed, it can grow or diminish according to the experiences we have in our lives, how others view us can also have an impact. Positive intervention and focused teaching in the Foundation Phase is necessary. Practitioners need to be aware that they are role models for young children, and that their attitudes and ideas can have an impact. Young children need to be supported and encouraged to be confident and have faith in their own abilities. They need to be valued and respected as individuals in their own right, with their own interests and sense of personal autonomy. Fostering young children’s personal, social development is not a panacea for the ills of society, it will not ensure that children work well, achieve in school and ultimately become socially competent. It is important to appreciate however, that children who have sound social and emotional development are more likely to have high self esteem, thus arguably will then be more able to perform competently in social and school situations.

The principle behind the research I carried out therefore, was to explore this dynamic and ascertain whether a targeted PSD/WB/EL programme entitled ‘Special Me Time’ facilitated by ITT students in the school of education will support young children in their personal and social development as well as on their learning journey.

Identification of the problem

With regard to this research, my personal interest in Personal and Social Development and emotional literacy, springs from experiences as a teacher and lecturer. Having seen the effects of low self esteem on learning, and how the role of the teacher / facilitator can in equal parts both motivate and demotivate young children (and also adult students). Bronfenbrenner’s work in the 1970’s looked at a dynamic whereby children do not develop in isolation. Social aspects of the learning process are a determining factor. The school setting is a complete micro version of society with all the associated stresses and strains, served up daily to the young child. My role as the facilitator of new knowledge is to reflect on ways in which I can develop the professional understanding and skills base of students, whilst assessing that they comprehend and are able to apply what they have learned. Nicholls (2001, p.21) stressed that professionals can ‘reflect on their experience, make it more explicit through having to share it, interpret it and recognise it as a basis for future learning’ this would be an outcome for all parties.
The ‘problem’ therefore, was to ensure two things:

1. That I equipped my students with the knowledge and skills to facilitate the ‘Special Me Time’ programme - a targeted 6 week programme, for use in the Foundation Phase setting.

2. That students appreciated the importance of fostering sound PSD/WB/EL skills in the children that they work with and would see some difference (albeit a small one) from supporting this area with a targeted approach over a six week period.

Literature Review

There were a number of key factors which were pertinent in undertaking this research project. The key factor in any study towards a professional doctorate must be that the project should focus on change. I was also very much aware that the process should involve reflection at an in-depth level and not at a surface level. Boud et al. (1985) viewed reflection as a process consisting of three important elements which involved revisiting experiences, being mindful of your own feelings when reflecting and evaluation of experiences. With this in mind, I felt it was important to focus on the changes which were occurring as part of the Welsh Assembly Government’s implementation of the Foundation Phase Framework (2008).

As I will discussed earlier, Personal and Social Development and Well-being became a distinct curriculum area within the Foundation Phase in 2008. The direct effect of changes in the early years curriculum, meant that modifications would need to be made to the delivery of information to student teachers who were studying within the school of Education in my institution, towards PGCE and BA Primary programmes. Students needed to be made aware of the importance of PSD/WB as a ‘core’ consideration of Foundation Phase pedagogy, and therefore, be able to acquire the necessary skills and in my opinion, mindset, to be able to deliver PSD/WB across the curriculum. The main focus of this research was based on the premise that students would use a targeted programme namely ‘Special Me Time’ (SMT) (a programme that I had devised) with the young children that they were teaching on their Foundation Phase teaching placement. SMT consisted of six individual lessons, on a PSD/WB/EL theme held over a six week period. The sessions were designed as individual sessions, however, students would be able to use them as they wished, whilst on placement, personalising them or changing them to suit the circumstances relating to the young children in their placement setting. During the six week period, students would take an initial baseline assessment to gauge children’s personal and social development and then another assessment using this baseline at the end of the six week period. As part of the programme, students would also teach and evaluate a lesson each week which related to a PSD/WB/EL theme. Students would be required to gauge the children’s contributions to these lessons and attempt to chart the children’s progress on a continuum which related to PSD/WB/EL. The basic premise of the research was therefore to ascertain whether ‘Special
Me Time’ had any impact on young children’s development or understanding of issues relating to PSD/WB/EL and whether ITET students in the School of Education had been sufficiently trained and supported in the implementation and ultimately execution and understanding of such a scheme.

To begin my reflective process, I began to think about what changes I needed to incorporate within my teaching sessions to inform and educate students and give them a clear understanding of the basics relating to PSD/WB and EL. The students needed to become aware of the developments relating to implementing a curriculum which was responsive to children’s PSD/WB/EL. I therefore, had to adapt my teaching materials and modify current early childhood studies modules accordingly to reflect the changes that WAG had specified. I based this model of change on Gibbs reflective cycle (1998) as detailed in figure 1 below. I also reflected on my own feelings at the enormity of such a task, especially as I had found anecdotally that colleagues and students, often viewed PSD/WB as an ‘add on’ rather than what WAG now envisaged as an important curriculum area in its own right.

Figure 1. Diagram to illustrate the change process based on Gibbs (1998)

Research by Raver (2002) has suggested that young children who are more emotionally well-adjusted have a greater chance of school success, regardless of their cognitive ability or family background. Longitudinal studies in the USA (Raver and Knitzer 2002, Zins et. al 2004, Kutnick, et. al 2008) have found academic achievement for example, skills such as reading or writing in the early years, were built
on a firm foundation of social and emotional competence. It is also important to remember that young children learn and should be taught in an ‘holistic’ way. Dowling (2000, p.12) summed this up succinctly: ‘It is generally accepted that a child who has sound self-esteem is well placed to learn. Dowling’s ideas link closely with those of Maslow (1970, 1998) who indicated that children who are not confident in their ability to learn will not thrive in the educational setting. Maslow believed that ‘self-actualisation’ the ability to find self fulfilment and to realise one’s own potential, could not occur until various other physiological and psychological needs were met. Without a positive self-image children may never reach their full potential.

There are many factors which determine a child’s level of ‘Personal and Social Development (PSD). One major element is their social and cultural background and ultimately, the way in which they have been ‘parented’ and socialised within their family. Dowling (2000, p.125) asserted ‘our experience of being ‘parented’ is probably the strongest influence on our attitudes and behaviours’. Whilst we cannot ensure that all young children have equality of experience in their home environment, however, practitioners can go some way to addressing any imbalance within a caring and nurturing Foundation Phase setting. Social competence is now being viewed as an important factor for effective social and educational functioning. Competency in this area can impact on a child’s ability to learn, form relationships and operate in the wider world. The Primary National Strategy, England, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning guidance (SEALS, 2005, p.6) sets out five broad aspects for effective social and emotional learning: ‘self awareness; managing feelings; motivation; empathy and social skills’. The guidance stresses the value of developing these skills when working with young children. ‘Social, emotional and behaviour skills underlie almost every aspect of school, home and community life, including effective learning and getting on with people’ (p.7). It is not too strong a point to say that young children’s development is inextricably bound to their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. How children view themselves affects their relationships and how they react in certain situations.

New guidance from the DCSF, entitled ‘Social and Emotional Aspects of Development’ (SEAD) (2008) is designed to help practitioners support children in their very earliest relationships with others. It is intended for use with children from 0 – 36 months. This age phase is a vital place to embed, support and develop skills relating to personal and social development. Lindon (2005) suggested, learning is not all intellectual or rational; feelings are equally important. It is important that children develop in confidence so that they can learn’, (p.103). The role of early educators, should therefore firstly, be to support children’s social and emotional development and to allow children to begin to find their place in the social world. Secondly, to help maintain young children’s early language skills in order for the two areas of social and emotional development and language to develop in tandem. It seems evident, that development in these areas, is complementary, so by supporting one area, this is facilitating growth and confidence in the other.

Over the last ten to fifteen years there has been a growing realisation of the link between social and emotional development and achievement. However, earlier definitions are available such as Thorndike (1920) who thought that some people possessed more ‘social intelligence’ (SI) than others and were more equipped to operate within a social context, by having a better understanding of the complexities of human relationships. Moss and Hunt (1927) defined SI as the ability to form good
relationships with others, whereas Vernon (1933) provided a definition which related to competency in social techniques or within social structures, appropriate use of manners and social cues. Knowledge of a society’s expectations, were also viewed as important by Vernon, along with the ability to ‘understand the temporary moods or underlying personality traits of strangers’, (p.44).

It must also be stated at this juncture in the study, that there are academics, authors and psychologists who dispute findings of others who have studied and presented findings in the field of EL. Murphy (2006) is a strong critic of the EL Agenda. He disputes, the research of social scientists such as Thorndike, saying that this research was done in culturally restricted ways. He illustrated this example by emphasising that most of Thorndike’s research on social intelligence, related to the USA, which gave it a very narrow social viewpoint and focus. Murphy also argued against interventions aimed at the development of high self esteem in children, he referred to research by Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996) citing their ideas that high self esteem may lead to ‘denial of problems and excessive self enhancement’ (p.19).

Practitioners must build very close bonds with young children in order to be able to decipher information pertinent to the child’s personality or well-being. Settings may need to employ the ‘key worker’ model, whereby a member of staff works closely with a particular group of children, getting to know them and their families in depth.

Research has demonstrated that aspects of EL can be taught to young children in the school context by teachers. This may be done by using a targeted approach or in a more holistic way through use of ‘Circle Time’ or during whole school assemblies or whole school personal and Social Education (PSE) or indeed Citizenship. The promoting alternative thinking (PATHS) curriculum provided young children in the USA with instruction in a variety of issues relating to the expression, understanding and control of their emotions. This was achieved by providing them with a series of taught sessions over a period of time and with the use of a selection of specialised resources. Greenberg, Kushe and Cook (1991), the originators of the programme, argued that the transmission of skills that relate to the acquisition of social and emotional competence, was in itself an emotive process for young children. The development of any skill by the young child can be a slow process. Greenberg, Kushe and Cook’s findings from the evaluation of the PATHS programme demonstrated that ‘aspects of emotional understanding can successfully be taught in the school environment by classroom teachers of elementary school aged children’ (p.12). The PATHS curriculum, seemed to encompass for the first time a demonstration of the link between teaching and learning with a distinct outcome, which directly related to enhanced EL. The present research, develops ideas first developed on the PATHS programme.

The ITET students from the CSOE who carried out ‘Special Me Time’ activities with the children in their partnership settings, used activities and instruction, which was closely related to emotional aspects and the PSD/WB framework of the Foundation Phase. The rationale and outcome of this programme of intervention is detailed in the results section of this study. Aspects of ‘Special Me Time’ are similar to strategies used on the PATHS programme. Gravell and Hammond Rowley (2007) in a presentation to the Division of Education and Child Psychology conference described the need for schools to fulfill the ‘emotional and social needs of children’ ‘Special Me Time’ was designed to be a regular part of the ITT students teaching practice, thinking and ethos. Other similarities to the PATHS curriculum were its design and provision for both students and children to work with a vocabulary to explore ‘feelings’. The
structured activities were designed to enable children to identify and thus have more control over their feelings.

Another important aspect relating to building children’s personal and social development, as well as ensuring their well-being and emotional literacy, involves providing the right climate for learning. Collins (2007) reflected on the importance of ‘creating a positive classroom environment’ (p.7) which celebrated academic success along with personal qualities such as kindness and tolerance. The ‘Special Me Time’ programme was designed to allow students time and space to get to know the children they worked with and thus create a ‘positive’ climate.

Hawkey (2006 pp-137-147) explored the dynamic of preparing and equipping Initial Teacher Training students (ITT) with the knowledge and skills to teach EL to children. She argued that teacher educators must ensure that students own social competence is intact, before they are able to commence this process. She reflects on research by Weare and Gray (2003) whose study found evidence that ‘only a small minority of teachers appear to be in favour of work to promote emotional wellbeing and that the majority are reluctant to get involved, in part because they are not trained in how to do it. (Weare and Gray 2003, p.74 , cited in Hawkey, 2006) This suggests there is a skills / knowledge gap in relation to the training process for students, in relation to the importance of Personal and Social Development and emotional intelligence, emotional literacy.

Weare and Gray (2003, p7) recommended the use of ‘explicit’ programmes and curriculum guidance which outlined key principles for delivery of an emotionally responsive curriculum. They thought this should include prepared materials and examples of lesson plans. The ‘Special Me Time’ intervention programme was designed to take into account this advice. Further recommendations by Weare and Gray were also adhered to during this research project, namely that teachers ‘cannot transmit social competence and wellbeing effectively if their own emotional and social needs are not met’. (p7). I was mindful throughout the research project of the emotional well-being of the students in the research group, ensuring that regular support and feedback and advice was available for them.

The findings from this study will contribute to this area of knowledge, examining how the training of teachers in PSD/WB pedagogy and development of EL through the use of the ‘Special Me Time’ within a professional programme adds to our understanding of personal and social development, well-being and emotional literacy and the implications to Early Years Foundation Phase pedagogy in the School of Education.

**Research Design**

I was aware that being a professional doctorate student, I needed to relate theory very much to practice, with the outcome being that any knowledge gained through the research process would unpin and strengthen everyday professional practice and delivery of taught sessions in the school of education. Gray (2009) pondered when undertaking research, whether the researcher should ‘begin with theory or should theory itself result from the research?’ (p.14). What I found to be useful, whilst
undertaking the research, was to bear in mind the ideas of Dewey (1933) who discussed a general paradigm of enquiry that was based upon discovery e.g. the researcher actively uncovering evidence or facts – an essential part of any methodology and deduction, deducing what to make of a particular situation, once the research process has been completed (or indeed whilst ongoing).

The students’ actual role within the Foundation Phase setting was undergoing a process of change, due to the implementation of the Foundation Phase curriculum. Changing, the expectations for them were also shifting. They were not only being asked to teach, but also to facilitate and take responsibility for children’s developing PSD/WB/EL. Brannan et al (2007) found that the changing nature of employment and the demands placed upon employees (in this case the students) ‘can only be fully understood through the use of ethnographic techniques’. (p.396). Thus the observation of the system or ways of working within that system are crucial to understanding professional practice. The students were faced with a different set of expectations on their placements, they were tasked with teaching, supporting and facilitating a range of skills relating to PSD/WB/EL.

**Aims of the research**

The aim of this research was four fold:

1. to examine and assess the pedagogical knowledge of two cohorts of students specialising in early childhood studies / Foundation Phase pedagogy in relation to the Foundation Phase area of learning PSD/WB and the related aspects of EL.

2. to address any shortfall in knowledge by equipping students with additional skills or knowledge, for use on their Foundation Phase teaching placements.

3. for students to be able to use knowledge gained through the implementation of ‘Special Me Time’ to support, facilitate and assess young children’s PSD/WB/EL in the Foundation Phase setting.

4. to investigate the ITT students delivery of SMT and reflect on any outcomes.

**Research Hypothesis**

My initial hypothesis was that students needed to have a greater knowledge of PSD/WB/EL in order to be more effective and responsive practitioners in the Foundation Phase setting. Isaacs (1954, p.20) postulated ‘No method of education based upon the notion that the little child is a simple bodily machine or a mere creature of habit and reflex response can sustain him in his deepest difficulties.’ Teaching young children is a combination of practical teaching knowledge and also what can only be described as a feeling or ‘sense’ and understanding. Nias (1993) explored this dynamic suggesting that teaching young children involved a deep level of personal involvement and an ‘investment’ of the teachers ‘self’ (p.297).

Student teachers have a responsibility to provide young children with the tools to understand both themselves and their social world. In order to facilitate this process I believed that Foundation Phase ITT students in the School of Education needed to be taught how to appreciate the holistic nature of
learning in the Foundation Phase. A holistic approach to early years education, would relate to the practitioner being mindful of children’s overall development in a range of complementary and interlinked areas, namely, physical, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and cultural. The ITT students I worked with on this research, also needed to be equipped with specialist knowledge in relation to this dynamic and to appreciate and have a clear idea of the close relationship between feelings and learning. I believed that current training provision for students in this area was insufficient within the school of education.

This research aimed to provide answers to and some ways of facilitating this process. The research explored theoretical ideas on pedagogy such as the acquisition of ‘craft knowledge’ which is seen by Shimahara (1998) as ‘pedagogical content knowledge’, therefore, I was aiming to build upon my students own understanding of pedagogy, which was unique to their particular way of working with very young children. Brown and Mc Intyre (1993) carried out research in the Australian school system and found that there was a wealth of untapped professional knowledge which teachers acquired routinely through practical experience in the classroom. The interpersonal dynamics between the lecturer, student and the classroom teacher means that much pedagogical knowledge is gained through ‘hands on’ experience. Also, the student teacher may absorb another teachers style or ideas consciously or unconsciously.

The ‘Special Me Time’ Programme

The basis of this research was the implementation and study of the ‘Special Me Time’ programme. This was a programme designed by myself. It consisted of six pre-planned PSD/WB/EL lessons / sessions which were delivered over two six week periods, during two school teaching placements by BA and PGCE ITT students from the school of education and then delivered by them in a range of Foundation Phase settings.

What is special Me Time?

Special Me Time was a targeted programme of six planned activities relating to PSD/WB and EL. Activities were designed to enable students to explore a range of PSD/WB /EL ‘themes’ with children such as sharing, co-operation and friendship and explore more specific concepts such as jealousy, pride etc. The idea behind the programme was that students would take an initial baseline of children’s abilities relating to PSD/WB/EL, deliver the pre-planned sessions over the six week period and then record their findings on how the children related to the themes and whether there was any noticeable change in the children’s competencies relating to PSD/WB/EL (such as behaviour, attentiveness, being able to share / relate to other children more successfully etc.) over the six week period of the programme.

Who undertook it?

A total of 12 students initially became members of placement A on the ‘Special Me Time’ programme. Eight students from the PGCE Primary Foundation Phase IPD cohort 2007/8 and Four students from the Year 3 BA Primary (Hons) with QTS, Early Childhood Specialism cohort 2007/8. The overall total of students undertaking placement A was therefore twelve – eight PGCE students and four BA year three students.
What did the students do?

Students were given six pre-planned PSD/WB activities at the ‘Special Me Time’ Training day and full instructions on how to carry out the programme with the children in their placement schools (further details follow in this section). The rationale behind giving the students pre-planned activities was that it would not only save them valuable planning time, but ensure that the students would be delivering the same sessions to different groups of children. This would reduce variables and permit some triangulation and student sessions could be compared. Silverman (1993, p. 99) called this ‘investigator triangulation’. Benefits to the students of undertaking this programme of intervention were thought to be increased pedagogical knowledge and experience and greater confidence, which should enhance applications for teaching positions.

The students were asked to undertake one session of ‘Special Me Time’ with the children in their placement school per week. A baseline of children’s PSD/WB and EL was also undertaken by the students on commencing the programme and on cessation. Students also undertook observations of the children’s PSD/WB/EL during the programme and kept a ‘reflective diary’ which enabled them to note any pertinent findings. A reflective diary is a medium for recording thoughts, feelings and experiences rather than just detailing everyday occurrences. The aim of the reflective diary was to encourage students to explore and reflect on the experiences they gained as part of the ‘Special Me Time’ programme. Ideally as Bolton (2005) suggested, reflective diaries enable the practitioner to recall significant incidents, make sense of them and then use the experience gained. Reed and Canning (2010) view the reflective diary as a valuable tool in which to record thoughts as well as being a ‘stimulus for a deeper learning and personal change’ (p.18).

When / Where did the research occur?

The research took place as follows:

- Placement A delivery of ‘Special Me Time’ for six weeks from 07.01.08 until 18.02.08 (all students) and
- Placement B for six weeks during the period 28.04.08 until 07.07.08. (3 PGCE students only)

The students were placed in a variety of Foundation Phase settings, in either primary or nursery schools in the Cardiff area, the Vale of Glamorgan and the South Wales Valleys. The research took place over academic years, 06/07 to 07/08.

Reflection

Research evidence and ideas which are generated as a result of this research will be cascaded to other colleagues who teach on other programmes. This will hopefully result in a team approach to teaching in this area. The research may also draw on other colleague’s professional expertise. Hopefully, the research will be of benefit to the School of Education ‘team’ as a whole and ultimately, any other
professional colleagues. It is a huge responsibility to provide young children with the tools to understand both themselves and their social world. In order to begin this process, ITT students in the School of Education need to be taught how to appreciate the holistic nature of learning in the early years. They also, must be equipped with specialist knowledge and have a clear idea of the close relationship between feelings and learning.

This research will aim to provide answers and some ways of facilitating this process. However as with all research, may uncover more questions than answers, but should go some way to providing food for thought, informing practice and producing quality training for ITT students. Throughout this research project there have been a variety of key themes on which I have pondered and aimed to draw some conclusions from. The role of the teacher and in the case of this project the student teacher is a vital dynamic in the life of the young child in school. Schools play a key role in the formation of young children’s academic and emotional formation. McLaughlin (2008) stressed that an important function of a school was to have ‘wide conceptions of achievement’ (p.357) therefore, as well as considering children’s sporting, academic or musical competencies, schools should put in place systems which enable children to develop competencies such as taking responsibility and fostering sound relationships with others. The ITT students who undertook the SMT programme found that the children responded well to the sessions and were keen to share and explore relationships with others. They also found that by fostering a positive nurturing atmosphere in their classroom the children naturally supported and helped their peers both in the SMT tasks and in other everyday activities. The teacher sets the emotional climate within the classroom and are very powerful agents for change. Howard et al. (1999, p.313 cited in McLaughlin 2008, p.357) echo this theme, thus: ‘the most frequently encountered non-family, positive role models in the lives of resilient children were favourite teachers who took a personal interest in them…and were also confidants and positive models for personal identification’.

It can be argued therefore, that by giving children the space and autonomy, within the SMT sessions to be heard and valued within the classroom, the student teachers were empowering the children and helping to make them more emotionally resilient, which has been discussed previously in this research and is a key factor in school success (Benard 1995, Werner and Smith 1989). Current educational thinking by Government, stresses the importance of consulting and involving children in the decision making process e.g. the advent and engagement of schools with concepts such as school councils, which give children a real voice and input into the decision making process are sound. Previous ‘taboo’ areas such as exploring and safeguarding children’s mental health are now being discussed and provided at a primary care level in local authorities. In South Wales, the Child and Adolescent mental health service has a primary mental health co-ordinator who is responsible for children’s mental health over a geographical area. Programmes such as the ‘Student Assistance Programme’ are currently running in a number of secondary and primary schools in the area. This programme is based on an American model (cwsap.com) which provides a non-judgemental safe space for children to talk about the issues that affect them, with an adult (usually a teacher) who will listen to them. It is a successful early intervention and prevention system which supports children’s mental health.
The benefits to schools of promoting children’s emotional health and well-being are also recognised by WAG in the draft document ‘Thinking Positively: Emotional Health and Well-Being in Schools and Early Years Settings’ (2009). The document lists many benefits of promoting emotional health and well-being but especially highlights the school effectiveness agenda by referring to teaching and learning aspects, whereby, schools who provide a nurturing environment and are mindful of children’s well-being have ‘pupils who are more engaged in the learning process’ (p.5) benefits to behaviour and attendance were also discussed with ‘fewer pupils disengaged from learning and school’ (p.5).

Children’s personal and social development, well-being and emotional literacy is developed through a number of factors. The teaching and learning process, the school community and the quality of the relationship between teacher and child is also a vital factor. The use of the Special Me Time programme in the context of this professional doctorate showed how on a very small scale, targeted support and most importantly teacher time and interest had a small but significant impact on the personal and social development, well-being and emotional literacy of young children in a variety of Foundation Phase settings. This research, therefore suggests that if educators take the development of personal and social development, well-being and emotional literacy seriously, their efforts will pay dividends.

**Key issues**

It has been proposed in this research that the most emotionally literate students will be the ones that foster the best PSD/WB/EL skills with the children they work with. Catherine Corrie (2008) said that the job of the early years educator was to ‘assist children in finding their inner genius’. As a teacher educator, I believed it was my role to ensure that my students realised the importance that their thinking and ethos made to the young children they would teach and ultimately care for. Throughout the research process, I was fortunate to work with a group of students who were motivated, professional and engaged throughout the programme. They showed me that they had sound emotional literacy and were interested and keen to develop a wide range of PSD/WB/EL skills in the children that they were working with.

The most effective teachers in my opinion, are those who are prepared to work outside their comfort zone, to challenge themselves and maybe make mistakes along the way. The effective Foundation Phase practitioner must respect and value young children and in effect, learn from them. The role of the teacher in the Foundation Phase setting is a complex one. Teachers need to deliver effective pedagogy but they must also be mindful of the love and care that young children need daily. The key to understanding young children’s PSD/WB/EL is getting to know them and developing a caring relationship with them. It is also important to listen to them, and take time to reflect on their questions and insights. It is also important for the Foundation Phase practitioner to build effective relationships with parents and understand the dynamics which are present in the child’s home environment. It is a huge responsibility to provide young children with the tools to understand both themselves and their world.
Recommendations and way forward

- Continue to train students in observations methods / PSD/WB/EL pedagogy
- Further emphasis on the use of reflective diaries as a pedagogical tool on ITT programmes
- Further development of Special Me Time activities for students use on teaching practice
- Development of other strategies for fostering PSD/WB/EL within teaching pedagogy in the school of education such as circle time, P4C etc.

In order to facilitate these recommendations, I believe the ITT students need to continue to appreciate the holistic nature of learning in the Foundation Phase. I have aimed where possible to provide them with specialist knowledge relating to PSD/WB/EL and they also carried out their own research into this area. One of the concepts we explored as part of the the SMT training day was the link between feelings and learning (Peart, 2002) and if children’s emotional feelings are good, that is they feel happy and confident, it follows that they will be happy and ready to learn, and to take on new challenges. I think this advice was just as pertinent for my ITT students, who will now hopefully go on to be happy, responsive teachers who are mindful of children’s feelings and who understand the link between sound PSD/WB/EL and children’s attainment.

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