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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 in the Foundation Phase Setting.**

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**Background**

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Foundation Phase Framework (FP) began statutory roll out in September 2008. Personal and Social Development (PSD) and Well-Being (WB) are seen as being at the 'heart' of the FP and became a distinct curriculum area. The effect of changes in the FP curriculum, meant that modifications would need to be made to the delivery of training for ITT students. Students needed to appreciate the importance of PSD/WB/EL as a 'core' consideration of FP pedagogy, and to acquire the necessary skills and mindset, to be able to deliver PSD/WB across the curriculum. There were two fundamental issues involved in this process. Firstly, students would need to be aware of the importance of PSD/ WB as an integral part of their professional practice, Secondly, students would need to develop their own emotional literacy, by thinking and acting in an emotionally responsive way when working with young children.

**Research Questions**

The main focus of this research was based on the use of a targeted programme: 'Special Me Time', which the ITT students would carry out with the children on teaching placement. 'Special Me Time' (Davis, 2008) consisted of six individual lessons, on a PSD/WB/ EL theme and was taught over a six week teaching placement period. On commencing the programme, students would undertake an initial baseline assessment to gauge children's PSD/WB/EL and then another assessment at the end. Students would teach and evaluate a lesson each week from the programme. Students would be required to gauge the children's contributions to these lessons and attempt to chart the children's progress, recording their findings in a 'reflective' diary. 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 ITT students had been sufficiently trained and supported in the implementation, execution and understanding of such a scheme.

**Methods**

As this research was based firmly within a work dynamic, reflection on professional practice formed an integral part of this methodology. By employing an ethnographical approach it was possible to reflect on the field work undertaken by students when implementing the programme. This involved observing the development of inter-personal relationships and working practices of students relating to young children in the school environment. Brannan et al (2007) found that the changing nature of employment and the demands placed upon employees (in this case the students) are best understood through the use of ethnographic techniques. Thus the observation of the system or ways of working within that system are crucial to understanding and ultimately developing professional practice.

As the study is based on the principles of reflective practice, reflection and narrative are seen as an integral part of the research process. Observation of students on placement gave rich qualitative data, along with students work products such as lesson plans, observations/ baseline assessment and completion of a student reflective diary. Student interviews, questionnaires and focus groups gave further quantitative data.

Bassey (1999) stressed the importance of 'analytical accounts' of educational events, A central tenet of this research was to study educational events and then reflect /refine pedagogy following this process.

## **Frame**

Research by Raver et al (2002) 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 (Zins et. al 2004) found academic skills such as reading or writing in the early years, were built on a firm foundation of social and emotional competence.

Hartup (1992) implied that young children's ability to form successful peer relationships contributed to their social and cognitive development. The FP teacher should facilitate and develop an empathetic environment where children feel confident and empowered to learn and thus develop to their potential. Killick (2006) valued the facilitation of respect, co-operation and consideration when working with children. He believed that the teachers role was important in demonstrating and modeling empathetic behaviour, with values being 'caught rather than taught' (p.17). This demonstrates the importance of the FP practitioner being a good role model, being aware of young children's needs and in being cognisant with their own EL.

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## **Research findings**

The research aimed to provide students with sufficient knowledge to recognise and support children's PSD/WB/EL. The development of training materials to support students teaching practice - in the form of the 'Special Me Time' programme will contribute to future pedagogy.

The analysis of results highlighted that:

- Some students were initially unaware of the importance or value of supporting young children's PSD/WB/EL. They were also initially unaware of the link between children's feelings and their behaviour.

- Students needed to know more about PSD/WB/EL to be able to teach and support children more effectively.
- Students needed to improve on their own EL.
- Students saw a definite benefit from undertaking the 'Special Me Time programme', although they sometimes found it difficult to effectively quantify the differences that PSD/WB/EL activities made in the timescale available.
- In some cases, students noticed changes in children, in relation to their confidence and general resilience and well being. Changes in classroom management were also apparent.
- The research highlighted the importance of ITT staff nurturing and supporting students whilst on placement - bearing in mind the students own EL and wellbeing needs.