

**0102**

## **The Role of the Centre for the Child and Family in contributing to the development of the 'New Professional' in Initial Teacher Education**

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### **Background**

Liverpool Hope University has created a Centre for the Child and Family as a new initiative within the University. The development of the Centre is a research project in its own right, seeking to integrate a participatory approach to knowledge creation that transforms our understanding of how to improve the wellbeing of children and young people, through exploring and evaluating a collaborative way of working across professions and disciplines. It aims to test out the hypothesis that "the wellbeing of children can be continuously improved by pooling the energy, values and talents of the numerous professionals who are passionate about making a difference to the quality of children's lives."

Education has a major contribution to play in the improvement of children's lives; and teachers play a central role in the educational process. Consequently, the quality of education that student teachers themselves receive is crucial. A major dimension of the work of the Centre will be to explore how it can contribute to the process of developing the 'new professional' who is able to skilfully engage in inter-professional activity in the context of an integrated children's workforce.

### **Research Questions**

The creation of effective partnerships is critical to multi-agency working. We need to look at the concept and practice of partnership in more expanded and imaginative ways to meet the requirements of a rapidly changing social, political and educational agenda. Within this scenario, the demands on teachers are increasing, including an expectation that they may well be required to play a lead role within an inter-professional context, having responsibility for assessing the needs of children that are not being met by universal services (CWDC 2008a,b).

If teachers are to be prepared for this role, there are implications for curriculum development in initial teacher education (ITE), including placement opportunities. At present, the concept of 'partnership' generally means a partnership between the school and university; however within an integrated services context, this perception will need to be expanded to include all children's services.

A significant aspect of this enquiry is to explore how, within an ITE context, we can prepare students for their future educational roles by giving them opportunities to experience and learn about different professions within children's services settings. This cannot happen without engaging the collaboration of a wide range of professionals, most of whom will not previously have seen themselves as having any relevant contribution to make to ITE.

Working within and alongside the New Professionalism research project, the Centre for the Child and Family will provide a focus for building on the findings of this project, by bringing together an inter-professional group to explore how they can develop and enhance their partnership working. One explicit aim of new partnerships would be to identify ways in which different professional groups can contribute to students gaining knowledge and experience of integrated services; in other words, to encourage professionals to accept some level of responsibility for supporting the education of the teachers of the future, and to engage in collaborative learning as to how this might be achieved.

### **Methods**

It is intended to use Ledwith and Springett's (2009) transformative model for participatory practice as the framework for planning and evaluating work undertaken by the Centre. They identify what they

perceive to be the key dimensions of transformative change - Local/Global, Collective/Self, Ontology/Epistemology, Action/Reflection, and Inner/Outer Consciousness. These dimensions are seen to be interconnected, with the energy for change being created by the dialectical relation between each component, and the system becoming out of balance if any one dimension is weak or missing.

It is intended to develop and evaluate the value of this model in a wide range of contexts, through creating a community of professionals committed to working individually and collaboratively to generate knowledge that will enable us to integrate research and practice, across disciplines and between professions, to enable a demonstrable improvement in the wellbeing of children and young people.

Within the context of this specific project related to teacher education, we will explore the value of the model in improving the wellbeing of children and young people through developing the 'new professional' who is well prepared to work with competence and confidence in an integrated children's services environment.

## **Frame**

Action research "suggests an orientation to research that is aimed at improving participants' lives" (Reason and Bradbury 2001: xxi), and hence offers a methodology that allows the participatory principles of Ledwith and Springett's model to be evaluated and developed in practice.

Reason and Bradbury are clear about the transformative possibilities of action research, and its commitment to integrating research and practice:

*By bringing scholarship and praxis back together, thereby drawing on long cultural traditions, our immodest aim is to change the relationship between knowledge and practice, to provide a model of social science for the twenty-first century as the academy seeks additions and alternatives to its heretofore 'ivory tower' positivist model of science, research and practice (xxxiv) .*

Action research is a way of engaging with others in collaborative relationships, opening new communicative spaces in which true dialogue and learning can flourish. Using this approach in the context of ITE will enable us to explore ways of opening communicative spaces for professionals in children's services, within which new forms of partnership working can emerge and develop.

## **Research findings**

Ledwith and Springett (2009) claim: "This simple model offers you a framework for the planning and evaluation of your practice, extending it beyond the specific to its widest possible potential" (p. 216). In undertaking this research, we will be evaluating the framework in terms of its value in shaping a process that will encourage the development of effective partnerships in ITE, through enhancing the collaborative learning of professionals within children's services. Through exploring and evaluating the significance of each of Ledwith and Springett's five dimensions in relation to developing partnership working, we will contribute to a knowledge base concerning how to better prepare ITE students for inter-professional working.