

**Session 3 - Presentation 3 papers in the hour (15.00 – 15.15) Thursday May 11th**  
**3V39 Session lead: Jo Josephidou**  
**Room: Meeting Room 122**

**Title: Post Graduate Student Early Years Teachers' Perceptions Of H.E. Teaching and Learning Strategies Which May Be Effective In Terms Of Developing Best Professional Practice In Early Years Contexts**

**Lead Presenter:** Christina Costello-Judge – University of Cumbria

**Co-presenter:** Margaret Foster – University of Cumbria

**Aim:** This paper reports on a project designed to address the differences between student perception and the reality of study during undergraduate early years education and childhood studies courses. Analysis of application data demonstrated that entrants to these courses were typically young, and a significant number were admitted with non-traditional qualifications. The study initially focused on methods of supporting transition from a variety of contexts ranging from H.E. or the workplace to early years education courses at University. The study subsequently evolved into an exploration of students' perceptions of participation in the teaching learning processes, the impact this had on their expectations of subsequent teaching and learning opportunities in HE with an emphasis on the effects on student experiences of becoming practitioner researchers.

**Content:** The REPEY study (2003) stresses that teachers with a well developed academic understanding of their role have a better impact on children's learning. Programme and national analysis data demonstrated that the induction and academic development of early years and childhood studies students needed improvement, so that these students could gain maximum benefit from their studies and become effective in early childhood education and care.

Student focus groups identified that the language of HE and the degree of independent learning were seen as problematic by young students. Researchers built on the work of Sambell et al (2010) by adopting teaching and learning approaches which were participatory and interactive. Concepts of reflection and criticality were deconstructed with the students to give them a better understanding. Tutors aimed to work within the students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky) and applied their professional teaching skills and student-centred approaches to tackling this challenge. Inspired by the work of Malaguzzi (1993) and the notion of building a curriculum around the learner based on the learner's current level of development and interest tutors' practice included inviting students to become active researchers as part of a final year module in order to explore students' perceptions of meaning, relevance and power in the learning /teaching process.

The strategy was evaluated using a mixed method approach. Data was collected at several points throughout the academic year from a sample of 20 Post Graduate initial teacher training Early Years students. The data were analysed using a grounded theory approach in order to elicit significant themes and identify which teaching and learning strategies were most effective in supporting student learning in HE and why. Data included the completion of reflective activity forms and interviews and/or questionnaires?

Follow up interviews are to be conducted towards the end of the academic year in order to elicit whether or not experience in planning, designing and implementing a small scale study has impacted on students' perceptions of teaching and learning in H.E. In addition to this there will be some exploration of attitudes regarding what students perceive as successful teaching and learning strategies and if change can be detected from

the most recent data when compared to initial data collected at the beginning of the academic year.

**Thinking deeply about teacher education:** The REPEY study (2003) confirms that highly qualified staff are more likely to be effective educators of young children. The initial catalyst for this study was a desire among the presenters to maximise the academic achievement of students planning to work as early years educators by investigating successful methods of transition from school to higher education this subsequently developed into the examination of the effect teaching and learning strategies to support students' continuous development as active learners.

**The country/ies to which the presentation relates:** This study was focused on students in the United Kingdom but of universal interest where students are prepared for teaching through study in higher education