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Enabling undergraduates to put into practice learning to support emotional well-being for children and young people

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In the UK policies such as the Children's Plan 2008 -2020 through to Promoting the Emotional Health of Children and Young People (2010) identify that professionals such as teachers, youth workers, social workers and youth offending specialists, do not have the necessary underpinning knowledge to adequately support children and young people's emotional well-being. Further that these professionals fail to recognise when a child or young person may need additional help. These findings suggest that gaining knowledge and understanding of emotional well-being for children and young people is a key requirement for those working in this field. This paper is an evaluation of an initiative that saw a partnership of developing joint learning materials from expert emotional well-being organisations being delivered as part of an undergraduate award at a traditional Higher Educational (HE) Institution. The evaluation showed that the introduction of interactive, e-learning materials, supplemented with role play and scenario based learning and running concurrently alongside work experiences enabled students to acquire and apply knowledge and understanding of emotional well-being for children and young people to real situations, and thus bridged the 'practice –theory gap'.

Keywords: emotional well-being, education and knowledge, applied practice, practice-theory gap

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Context

The BA programme in Childhood and Youth (the 'programme') at the University of Northampton in the UK, provides a pathway in preparing students for a professional role within children and young people's

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workforce. The programme follows a series of Higher Education (HE) modules designed and delivered by expert tutors using lectures, seminars and tutorials module. The modules have been developed to embrace the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce (CWDC 2010). Alongside their studies, students engage with work experiences, organised and supported by the University. Graduates of the programme have gained employment as project managers for the NSPCC, health charities, Local Authority, within schools. Other graduates have continued their education at Masters level in social work, primary school teaching, adolescent mental health and international development amongst others.

The term 'practice- theory gap' has emerged from the field of nursing and refers to the notion that what student nurses learn in the classroom does not bear much relevance to the reality of nursing in real situations (Allmark, 1995). This holds upon the premise that knowledge associated with practice cannot be taught and thus the knowledge that a practitioner has cannot be theory but must (therefore) be something else (Allmark, 1995; Wilson, 2008). This commonly held shibboleth appears to be strongly felt (NHS Commissioning Board, 2012); however if this was the case than the inference must be that theory does not inform practice and that practice therefore cannot be taught. A lot of research, however, refutes this (Allmark, 1995; Eraut, 1994; Schon, 1987; Scully, 2011; Tight, 2003; Wilson, 2008), and indeed professional vocational education has moved into Higher Education (in the UK) to increase the knowledge of theory in order to increase the quality of practitioners (Eraut, 1994; Schon, 1987; Tight, 2003) who suggest that learning occurs when knowledge is integrated and applied into the real world.

Wilson (2008) suggests it is the development of skills acquisition that bridges the practice –theory gap. Skills acquisition learning occurs alongside peers and mentors via shared learning, shared concerns and achievements and in cementing knowledge (Scully, 2011; Wilson, 2008) and this process supports students to become ready for the workplace. Further Scully (2011) notes that as the skills are developed the students' anxieties decrease, and an outcome from this might be suggested that concurrently, student confidence grows.

Thus this evaluation sought first to establish if students had acquired *knowledge and understanding* of children and young peoples' emotional well-being. It is the acquisition of that understanding that fits into the context of this evaluation: that student's attain an understanding and thus knowledge of children and young peoples' emotional well-being by learning about research, theory and practice on the topic. Secondly it sought to appraise if students' *applied* this knowledge when working directly with children and young people.

Evaluation Aim

This evaluation set out to establish if, using a focused blended learning module, which required students to be co-producers of their learning through reflection enabled them to acquire and use purposive knowledge and understanding of emotional well-being for children and young people, thus bridging the 'practice –theory gap' In her seminal work Benner (1982) suggests that knowledge and understanding underpins practice. Benner explains that nurses acquire knowledge through getting information, facts and skills through their education and experiences. She further breaks this down to knowing *how* and knowing *why*. This combination demonstrates the need of education (*why*) alongside real (practice) experiences (*how*). Benner's work is based within the field of nursing, however in developing and preparing professionals to

work with children and young people, Benner's principles have been adopted: that is education alongside related experience; creating supported opportunities for students to apply their learning (knowledge) within their work experiences.

Innovation module development and design

Within HE, it is common for a module team of expert tutors to write and design modules. However this module was designed, developed and written by a team of *recognised professionals* within the field of emotional well-being and mental health for children and young people in the United Kingdom. This was co-ordinated as a project by the School of Health at the University, commissioned with the support of the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust (CWMT, 2013) and Changing Minds (CM, 2013) part of the local Teaching Primary Care Trust. Both the CWMT and CM seek to raise awareness of emotional well-being locally and nationally. They part funded this project as they recognised the potential educational impact for professionals of the future.

Improving the module

The module was initially designed as a *purely online package*, asking students to work through relevant topics and submitting reflective writing as an end point assessment. This included online launch and instructions, tutor facilitated online discussion and allowed students to pace their work. Poor student evaluation and attainment became a feature of the first two presentations of the online module. Critically students admitted to non-engagement with the online materials; jumping to assessment only related aspects of the learning order to pass the module. In common with Kear's findings (2010) around online learning communities, tutors noted reluctant participation in the online forums and found a patchy pattern nature of engagement across the cohorts weakened the overall cohesion of the learning community.

Secondly, and crucially, students reported not being able to contextualise the learning on their own. An example of this was in understanding depression in children and young people. Students reported being unable to recognise the online described depressive features and behaviours when faced with the real thing. A tangible example was noted as one student described that whilst she had read about 'flat expression' she remained unsure of the reality of this. She then observed 'flat expression' working with a depressed young person and was able to know this as such. She was able to raise her concerns correctly with her workplace mentor.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Blended learning

The initial module presentation has moved from pure online into a blended learning approach. Within HE, effective learning has always involved using different techniques and strategies in order to develop knowledge and skills for the learners (Salmon, 2002). In their report for the Higher Education Academy, Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts and Francis (2006) suggest that blended learning engages and challenges the learner in different ways and thus nurtures learning and development. Moreover the HEA Report (Sharpe et

al., 2006) highlights that blended learning requires substantial investment in the educational technology and support in order for it to be successful.

Scenario based learning promotes a deeper understanding of a topic by taking students through real scenarios that require solutions (Clark, 2009). This learning technique necessitates students in problem solving, decision making and research, and expects them to apply knowledge, reinforce learning and overcome gaps in understanding. Scenario based learning provides a safe environment for students to learn, practice and test out their knowledge and skills (Gossman, Stewart, Jaspers & Chapman, 2007). This process, supported through experienced tutors, allows students to gain immediate feedback (from tutors and peers) and developmental opportunities throughout the staged processes (Clark, 2009; Gossman et al., 2007).

The evaluated module is delivered through a combination of online material including readings, interactive quizzes, drag and drop activities, policy hyperlinks, video and audio clips, scenario based learning and reflective journal keeping. This is supplemented with seminar sessions aimed to reinforce the scenario based learning, online learning material, engage students with group learning opportunities, support students for assessment and support and prepare students in their work experiences. Role play, facilitated by a practicing Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMH) professional, is a key aspect of the attended sessions. The new module presentation was developed over a period of 18 months and included a team comprising of the HE module leader, expert practitioner, IT technician and data administrator. This team aimed to maximise individual skills and use of time and has been shown, through University auditing, to be financially sound.

Methodology for the Evaluation

The evaluation utilised a mixed methodology approach chosen to gain the views and opinions of the participants (students) within the context of how these opinions were quantified and significant to the participants. The pivotal feature of mixed methodology is that this method suggests that it is the combined use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches that create a better understanding of an evaluation (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2006).

The data collection tools applied in the study was focus groups and questionnaires with students and a semi-structured interview with a senior academic staff. Further supplementary data collection used as the statistical data available for the module (produced by the University Quality Assurance Department). Data analysis was carried out using interpretative analysis of themes and key points. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is underpinned by seeking to understand how individuals make sense of their world /experiences through their personal perception of that experience, rather than objectively just producing an account of the experience. IPA enriches knowledge through these narratives (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008) and this philosophical analytical approach concurs with this evaluation aim, hence was selected as appropriate. Within this analysis thematic handling was used as the main strategy. For this evaluation, thematic analysis (Silverman, 2013) focused upon participants' experiences of learning and applying new knowledge in their workplace and how this reflected upon the student experience. Thematic analysis is a data handling strategy that helps to identify, analyse and reporting the themes that occur within the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can not only organise and describe

the data set but also offers an interpretation of the various aspects of the research. Thematic analysis offers a flexible approach to data analysis that can be derived from a particular theoretical stem or epistemological position (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and as such can be used to account for complex and varied data. It has been shown to fit well with an IPA approach to collecting data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

Evaluation participants

This evaluation looked at learning and the acquisition of new knowledge and the extent to which this knowledge was used to inform subsequent work experiences: purposive knowledge. The student participants for this evaluation were all current undergraduate students of the Programme, selected purposively (Bell, 2005). The participants were identified as those who would be able to provide information to order to meet the aim of the study, having completed the module. Each had also had work experiences with children and young people (organised by the University). They engaged with questionnaires and focus groups aimed at gaining their views on acquired knowledge and then using this knowledge with the children and young people they worked with. Because programme students were recruited as participants, the sample size, whilst not significantly large in order to transfer findings more generally across Higher Education, was a manageable sample from the available student cohort. Babbie (2009, p. 193) argues that “sometimes it’s appropriate to select a smaller sample on the basis of knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study” rather than larger numbers just to increase the sample size.

One problem of the sampling method chosen is that there was the potential for less open and more bias responses (Bowling, 2002) as participants may feel not able to comment on their course of study in a negative way or may feel they must say very good things about their programme, because the evaluation co-ordinator was the Module Leader and Programme Leader. This was militated against by briefing the student participants fully and explaining the need and desire for honesty, and reassuring them of their (recorded) anonymity, right to withdraw and no obligation status. However positionality is discussed more fully in the findings of the evaluation.

The other evaluation participant was a senior academic staff member who holds responsibility for the ‘Student Experience’. This involved a semi-structured interview around the context of student learning and employability within the notion of ‘value added’ which forms part of the overall strategic approach of the University.

Ethical considerations and confidentiality

Ethical review via a University Research Ethics Committee was sought and obtained. A range of ethical considerations were noted at the outset of the study, including The British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice (BSA, 2004), the Framework for Research Ethics (ESRC, 2010) and the Data Protection Act 1998 (OPSI, 1998). Ethical consent was gained due to the nature of the topic studied and applied in their work place /placement, by the student. For example questions about ‘emotional well-being’ have the potential to raise memories / experiences for the students which should be considered as potentially harmful. For example students will be asked to reflect upon their practice not personal experiences. The

module co-ordinator prepared information in order to signpost support services should the need arise. No student needed follow on support, information or raised any issue of concern.

As is usual for any evaluative work all participants will be asked for their informed consent and opt out options made available (BERA, 2011; ESRC, 2012). All participants gave their consent. Responses were recorded anonymously and this was maintained throughout the evaluation within the confines of the targeted non-random group sample. Participants received a covering letter which explained the evaluation. The covering letter was essential as part of the ethical processes of the study. The BSA (2004) guidelines state that all participants in the study must understand the process of the study, why their participation was necessary, how the findings are used, and who will see these findings (ESRC, 2012). The covering letter incorporated all these elements.

Prior to research taking place, participants should be briefed insofar as they understand the aims, design, methodology, outcome potential and their role (ESRC, 2012). Further de-brief allows participants to talk through the (research) experience and clarify any aspects that may have raised concerns for them (SRAE, 2004). This might include signposting information and help for follow up support for the participants. For this evaluation the participants were briefed through the covering letter and a verbal introduction to each activity reinforced that brief. A de-brief followed the focus group and interview, and allowed participants the opportunity to clarify the coordinator interpretations of the evaluation. The questionnaire included a contact point for participants for de-brief, but none required this. A dissemination session of the evaluation was held to clarify the interpretations and findings of the evaluation and to report changes planned for the module in the future. This took place for all participants.

Descriptive and quantitative data (of the module)

Information on pass rates for all modules and programmes are collated by the University as part of their Quality Assurance systems. The pass rate for the module has been noted as:

- 2009-10 = 88% (last presentation online)
- 2011-12 = 94% (first presentation of blended learning)
- 2012-13 = 100% (Unpublished University Q.A., 2013).

Thus academic testing suggests students have gained knowledge and understanding through achieving the module aims and learning outcomes. However, whilst the pass rate and related statistical data for the module contributed to this evaluation, it was only a small part of the data findings. The pass rate did indicate that students *have acquired knowledge* and partially answered the evaluation question, but it did not assess *if and how* students then used this knowledge.

The questionnaires sought to amplify this data by asking students some closed questions based on their reflections of the level and depth of knowledge they acquired and if this has been helpful in their

practice with children and young people. This gave some basic percentages in order to help answer the evaluation question. Student satisfaction quantitative data has not been consistently gathered by the University and thus there is little sound basis for comparison. However 2 small surveys taken as part of module development showed:

- 2009-10 = 38%
- 2010-11 not noted
- 2011-12 = 71%

The increase suggested the move to interactive, scenario based e-learning improved the learning experience for the students and a formal review in 2013 carried out jointly by the module leader and Information Technologist confirmed this with 98% satisfaction rate.

Summary of closed question responses

The questionnaires attracted a 71% response rate which was very good and suggests data can be purposefully used to generalise results (within this report) (Bell, 2005). Wisker (2001) argues that a questionnaire personally distributed to a participant who can make a connection to the evaluation is more likely to have a good response rate. There are several potential reasons for such a good response rates. Firstly, the questionnaire was distributed at the end of some scheduled teaching sessions. Consent and a discussion of purpose of the evaluation were discussed and the forms and questionnaires were handed out (separately). Once the participants had indicated they were comfortable with the process and questionnaires, and in order to minimise bias, the Module Leader left the room whilst the participants completed the questionnaires. Completed questionnaires were left on the table for collection once all participants had left – thus making every effort to maintain confidentiality. Secondly the position and influence of the evaluation co-ordinator needs to be considered within the responses (and rate) of the participants. The evaluation co-ordinator is also the Module Leader and Programme Leader and well known to all participants. Further consideration of influence, bias and the positionality of the evaluation co-ordinator are discussed within the limitations of this evaluation.

Results of closed questions

The results of the closed questions suggest an overwhelming positive response in equipping the participants with knowledge that could then be used within their workplace. This further suggests the module is bridging (to some extent) the practice –theory gap (Table I). Resilience was the first topic tackled by the module and participants: this was supported by the tutor as a demonstration of how the e-learning topics worked and the overall presentation of the blended learning style, thus it is unsurprising this was scored so highly as a theme (Table II). The second most significant theme was ‘how to’ practice, this wording was identified by a participant and supports the evaluation and module themes of theory into practice.

Table I. Summary of results of closed questions

Question	Yes	No	No response
Gained useful information from the module	92%	6%	2%
Equipped with a broad knowledge (of emotional health C&YP)	82%	12%	6%
Gained helpful information for practice	78%	20%	2%
Prepared for practice	66%	28%	6%

n=42

Table II. Themes identified from participants that have underpinned their new knowledge

Theme	Percentage identified
Resilience	53%
'How to' practice	28%
Asperger's	6%
Depression	6%
Attachment	6%
Self-harm	6%
Bullying	1%

n =42

Qualitative data*Questionnaires*

As noted above the response rate was very good at 71%. The evaluation sought information from participants about their learning experiences and real situations of the work place. Thus the questionnaire was predominantly qualitative in nature and asked open questions. Several closed questions provided additional quantitative data which gave a snapshot of data as noted above. Questionnaires were chosen for this evaluation as they are a time efficient method of asking the same questions of many participants within the same time span; gathering a breath of information which can then be explored in more depth. Further, questionnaires capture what people think and feel about their world (Bell, 2005) whilst ensuring anonymity for the participant, which was important for this percentages clear figures were been study. Open questions were used to get to the “central concerns of an issue as your respondents see them” (Bell, 2005, p. 214). From

this information trends and patterns can be identified and explored. In addition, open questions may raise unexpected responses that would enrich the evaluation and may provide insight into some explanations for the evaluation. In order to overcome some of the potential disadvantages the questionnaire was piloted with 3 students from another programme and changes in wording were made in response to their feedback that ensured the clarity of the questions.

The process of developing the questions for the questionnaire came from the findings around the suggested practice – theory gap and applied learning. Reviewing research in order to develop questions for evaluation is an accepted process of questionnaire development (Bryman, 2004). For this evaluation the findings from the questionnaire formed the basis of the trigger questions of the focus group. The open questions asked student participants to reflect back upon their learning throughout the module and identify and describe aspects they felt were important, this could have been a positive or negative response – no guidelines were specified for this. Below is a summary table (Table III) that shows the thematic analysis of these responses. Criteria for selection were that the theme had been identified by more than one participant. In summary, from this questionnaire thematic analysis and supportive quantitative data, it does appear that the module aims (learning and applying knowledge) are being met. Further the evaluation set out to establish if undergraduate students felt they have acquired and used the intended learning, knowledge and understanding and this also appears to be the case from the data collected from the interviews.

Focus groups

Focus group data collection methodology was chosen over face to face interviews as focus groups are considered less constricting and intimidating than a face to face interview (Bell, 2005). This last point took into consideration the influence and position of the Module Leader being the Programme Leader. The participants were used to working, discussing and debating as a collective group and gaining collegiate support from this, thus it was reasoned that a focus group had the potential to minimise the individual influence of the Programme Leader. For this evaluation the Programme Leader set out the context of the focus group as being significant in shaping the module future. Participants had previous experiences of their feedback being used purposively and thus the focus group started with the notions of trust and honesty already established. Further, it is a method that collects specific qualitative data within one pre-set time span and works by engaging with a small group of participants who are likely to be already busy (Bell, 2005). An agenda is set by the group facilitator (Noaks & Wincup, 2001) and this may take the form of prompt questions (Wilkinson, 2004).

Focus groups aim to probe deeper than the potential superficial responses gained from other means. Further, as a technique, focus groups help participants explore their values and beliefs (Noaks & Wincup, 2001). Whilst they have the potential to be less valuable for revealing personal experiences, they do support individuals to verbalise and explore thoughts and ideas that questionnaires or face to face interviews (Bowling, 2002). An advantage of a focus group is the less formal approach and this was useful within this evaluation due to the positionality of the evaluation co-ordinator.

Table III. Applied Learning Thematic Responses

Positive aspects: applied learning	Negative aspects: applied learning
Being able to reflect and use reflective practice	Needed more guidance for online aspects of blended learning
Using task and scenario based learning was successful in being able to apply learning to the workplace	Learning continued to develop across programme (that is emotional health not wholly confined to specific module)
Links to other module and content of the whole programme	
Individual project (via assessment) deepened knowledge of (chosen) topics	
How to identify (spot) emotional and mental health problems for C&YP	
Work experience alongside university learning allowed opportunities to put theory into practice: learning happened through experience	
Interest increased about topics and related practice and policy (for example)	
Understand basis for YP behaviour and responses	
Able to understand and practice in multi-agency way	
Raised awareness of need to learn and be independent learner	

n=42

Wilkinson (2004) discusses the merits of the naturalistic style of focus groups seeing the debate as egalitarian and allowing participants to elaborate and develop “themes most important to themselves” (2004, p.181). Further Wilkinson (2004) argues that this type of data would not be gained using the more intimidating style of face to face interviews. Wilkinson (2004) further advocates that one of the strengths of focus group methodology is the ethnographic data to be gathered from the social interactions of the participants. The focus groups were held in a familiar study -based environment with the thought that this familiar setting would contribute to the participants’ feelings of ease and camaraderie (Bell, 2005). A potential disadvantage of a focus group is that the group either fails to engage in discussion or the group dynamics mean there are limited opportunities for discussion to take place (Wilkinson, 2004). Thus the role

and competence of the facilitator is a key factor in the success of a focus group (Bowling, 2002). For this evaluation the focus group facilitator was an experienced group facilitator who has previously and successfully engaged with focus group work and analysis.

Audio recording of the focus group discussion is the most common method of data collection (Wilkinson, 2004) from which a transcription can be made and thematic or content or interpretive analysis can take place. For this evaluation both focus groups were audio recorded with whole group permissions. To ensure good attendance for the group Wilkinson advises “over-recruitment of participants by 50%” (2004, p.180). An effective focus group is usually between 8-12 participants (Bowling, 2002) lasting around 20 minutes. The evaluation focus groups both lasted between 20 – 25 minutes and both focus groups had very good attendance at 12 and 15 participants, thus the strategy of over-recruitment was a little too robust. However the evaluation co-ordinator was a competent facilitator and so the cohort numbers were not problematic. Again the position and influence of the focus group facilitator (for example related to strong recruitment) has been considered within the discussion of the evaluation, as the facilitator was also the Module Leader / Programme Leader.

Table IV shows common comments the student participants raised from the focus group. These meanings were checked with the focus group cohorts at the end of each session and agreed.

Table IV. What student participants concluded

Student comment	Meaning (checked with cohort)
It was the way the module was, with writing up all the time and then suddenly it links to something the children say. It is putting it into practice, that’s how I’ve learnt from it.	That at the time the taught content is covered there is not always a meaningful context.
I didn’t realise how much of it I do use now. You learn it in class but you don’t realise you’re using it but you do use it.	Using taught knowledge is the basis for evidence based practice and leads the way forward for sound (and best) practice
I can actually understand rather than just saying I do understand but actually not knowing. Helped me with engaging (with) children It helped me not to be judgemental	Evidence based practice supports confidence in the practitioner. Having knowledge and understanding of a (potential) condition helps ‘treat’ that condition and the child / young person remains individual and intact.
Gained insight. recognising resilience, depression, self-harm, distress	Underpinning knowledge is the key to supporting C&YP with specific issues. The right support and advice is offered to the right person by the right person.
I was more aware of what to do	Knowing limits of knowledge and role are also important components of a good practitioner

Semi-structured Interview

A semi structured interview was chosen for this evaluation as it allows for a fairly open conversation that is two-way (Miller & Glassner, 2005). It further facilitates the interviewee the opportunity to narrate their own experiences (King & Horrocks, 2010). An advantage of the semi-structured interview is that relevant areas of questioning and discussion, linking related topics, can be considered and prepared in advance; however more relevant questions and themes may emerge once the interview is underway (Miller & Glassner, 2005). The evaluation interview was a semi-structured interview as it made best use of the interview opportunity, as repeated interviews could not take place due to time constraints (Miller & Glassner, 2005) and it allowed topics to be tackled logically, and in an order considered by the interviewer who was able to see the questions prior to the interview (King & Horrocks, 2010) and allowed the interviewer to develop the focus for the interview from a prepared 'guide' of questions.

Table V illustrates that the interview highlighted that student satisfaction is not predicated upon student happiness with their programme, tutors and materials but is much more complex. Student satisfaction involves a much more reflective, rather than reactive, process and how this is captured (by standard evaluation) does not necessarily allow for this reflection to take place. For example the National and Internal Student Satisfaction (NSS and ISS) surveys occur whilst teaching is still on-going and assessment has not yet finished, thus feedback been not been received. In particular this impacts on programmes where work experiences will impact on the national and local term dates and so is not captured by the standard questions posed. This leads to data that is not a true reflection of the student experiences and their satisfaction, but it is data that holds a large influence on national and local standing.

Of this evaluation a more pivotal theme appears to be the engagement and contact the programme has with real work experiences and potential careers for the students. For example gaining experiences that help embed learning and enrich understanding (even if this experience is difficult) is (locally) reviewed by students as being very satisfactory as well as adding to the University critical success factors. The Senior Academic Staff participant expressed a need to work locally in addressing the need to change the thinking (and culture) of what constitutes a good academic Programme. Again, in line with the position of the University, this ties into the notion of being a vocationally based leading University (Petford, 2012) that puts graduate employability as a key critical success outcome.

Stakeholders

The same student participants were also stakeholders in this evaluation, in that the outcomes of this evaluation may well influence the future model of teaching and learning and structure for the programme. It also impacts upon their student experience, career pathways, future study and readiness for the work place and their employability. The Senior Academic Staff also acted as a participant and stakeholder in that she is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the University strategic aim linked to student satisfaction, which has a further connection to employability. The evaluation findings can clearly contribute to these aims and been taken forward as an exemplar.

Table V. Thematic feedback from the Senior Academic Staff

Developing Theme	Suggested Impact on student experience
Reflection supported links into practice	Need to teaching reflection as a professional and academic skill base
Student self- awareness increased with work experience.	Need to monitor and review learning journey for student.
Student developed confidence as practitioner.	Build in support and developmental opportunities in a systematic manner.
Student gained confidence to ‘look things up’, refer on and seek support	Acknowledge and credit assessed work experiences along academic achievements.
Educational theory: that what students see and do is a much stronger learning experience than direct face to face teaching.	Need to influence teaching, learning and assessment strategy across the University.
Experiential learning leads to deeper learning: it does not water down academic knowledge	Change culture and understanding of what constitutes ‘traditional’ HE teaching, learning and assessment suitable for HE (not just professional and vocationally orientated programmes).

Children and young people are clearly key stakeholders in this evaluation insofar as gaining from better educated and prepared professionals within the children’s’ workforce; for example in the implementation of support for their emotional well-being (Department of Health, 2010; James, 2010). However for the purpose of this evaluation children and young people were not included as participants due to the time limitations of the evaluation deadlines and the need to set up, gain and implement ethical considerations. This evaluation makes a clear acknowledgment that children and young people should be *the key people* in gaining evidence when considering whether the practice of the undergraduate students is effective in supporting emotional well-being. It is a recommendation that future evaluations should focus upon gaining this evidence. In common with the rationale and purpose of identifying children and young people as stakeholders, the workplace / setting has also been identified as a key stakeholder. Having a better educated and prepared workforce around children and young people’s emotional wellbeing is a clear purpose in this sector of Higher Education and as noted in the related reports noted above. A future evaluation should aim to gain evidence related to this notion of ‘readiness for employment’.

Findings of the Evaluation

The data has been interpretively analysed using a thematic paradigm and sought to compare student experiences of the knowledge they feel they acquired from the module and the application of this knowledge in supporting the emotional well-being of children and young people within their workplace. The interpretations have been discussed and agreed with the evaluation participants.

Theme 1: Acquiring knowledge

- Through the very high pass rate of the module assessments the quantitative data suggests that the student participants have acquired knowledge.
- The student participants, qualitatively, identified this acquired knowledge as purposive. They were able to identify key knowledge topics (for example; resilience, depression, self-harm) as being directly applicable to their practice experiences.
- Students were able to confidently (self-identified) discuss and explain theory and meaning of the topics with mentors and young people

Theme 2: Bridging the practice –theory gap

- Data from the same student participants overwhelming say they felt equipped (by the module) with knowledge that could then be used within their workplace. This theme was extended by the same participants identifying ‘how to’ practice, as the second most learnt theme.
- Real work experiences help embed learning and enrich understanding, even if this experience is difficult. This aspect is reviewed by students as being very satisfactory as well as adding to the University critical success factors

This evaluation showed how real life experiences, alongside reflective interactive learning experiences in the classroom and the online theoretical information came together for optimal student learning that is both applied and underpinned by evidence based theoretical knowledge (materials written by experts in their field). This integrated learning approach echoes the key principles noted by Tight (2003) and Sharpe et al., (2006) in teaching in HE. This builds further on Chapman and Clegg’s (2007) conceptualisation of the model of practical Higher Education as being explorative and integrative. These findings strongly suggest the module *is* contributing to students acquiring purposive knowledge and thus bridging the practice –theory gap.

Theme 3: Influential educational approaches

- Moving from pure online learning through to mixed delivery.
- Students as co-producers in their own education

The original module presentation aimed to answer some of the drivers for HE change in applying online education (Bach, Lewis-Smith & Haynes, 2007; Perry & Pilati, 2011) such as ease of access, self-determined learning space and utilising engaging digital technologies.

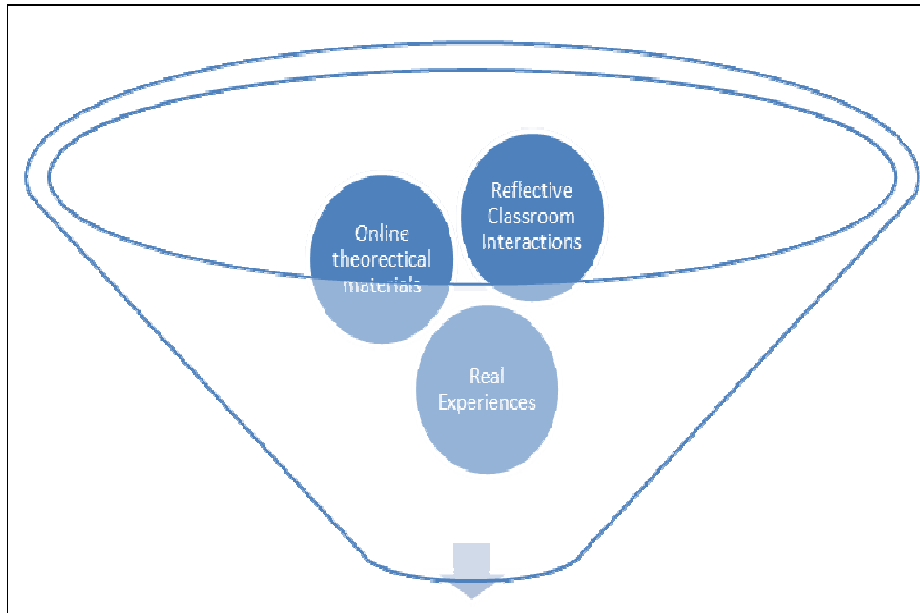


Figure 1 A model of Applied and Purposive Learning from this evaluation

Despite using generally accepted HE tools and activities in the design of the module, tracking and student evaluation found that students did not engage with the contents, activities or formative assessment. Further students reported feeling disengaged with the module as part of their studies.

The move to a blended teaching strategy was based on Ramsden’s notion (1992, 2003) of teaching as ‘transmitting knowledge’, ‘organising student activity’ and ‘making learning possible’ and one of the educational principles of “...intellectual challenge, independence, control and active engagement and learning from students” (adapted from Ramsden, 2003, p. 96) have underpinned the improvements and developments of the student learning experience in order to achieved applied purposive learning. Blended learning offered a vehicle of education that sought support the students to ‘learn to learn’ through their production of interactive activities online and in the classroom. This was underpinned with traditional values of constructionist educational theory (Condie & Livingston, 2007). Further Hagstrom and Lindberg (2013) suggest that education and educational processes can never be completely prescribed, in that education and knowledge is a co-operative process in which learning occurs by working things out together. This notion has been put into action through working things out between the student and tutor. Further the student was required to interact with the online and classroom materials; co-producing reflective activities for formative and summative assessment. With the support of the mentor and real experiences in the placement / workplace, students were able to produce their own repository of experiential reflective learning. Using the described data showing increased student satisfaction and attainment rates and the qualitative evidence of students being able to self-identify purposive learning indicates the move to blended learning has been successful.

Limitation of the Evaluation

The evaluation has taken place with the co-ordinator being known to student participants as a person of authority and power within their programme and the institution. This position was reversed for the semi-structured interview with the participant holding power and authority in the same context. That “all researchers are positioned whether they write about it explicitly, separately, or not at all” has been a key point for this evaluation (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p.115). The evaluation co-ordinator has considered this within the subjective-contextual factors of having a vested interest in gaining positive results from student evaluation, satisfaction and achievement. Further Ganga and Scott (2006) claim that insider research, defined by the researcher being an ‘insider’ by context, gives a sense of social proximity that may add authenticity to the research. However, this point also has the potential to enhance the different positions of the participants and researcher. Denzin et al., (2006) and Ganga and Scott (2006) suggest that so long as the voices of the participants remains the central points, rather than the interpretations of the researcher, the positionality of the researcher should not limit the value of the research.

For this evaluation, there was no suitable replacement to carry out the data collection. This was explained to the participants with assurances of confidentiality (questionnaires) and the rationale of a focus group rather than individual interviews to mitigate the authoritative position of the co-ordinator. This evaluation’s findings are based the interpretations of the co-ordinator which have been checked as a true reflection by the participants of the questionnaires (dissemination session), the focus groups (at the time) and the semi-structured interview (email follow up).

Whilst the evaluation has been successful in recruitment of participants, the student participants have been limited to one programme due to the context of the evaluated module. There are some suggestions, from the literature reviewed and the more general findings of the semi-structured interview, that the findings might be transferable to other vocationally orientated programmes.

Conclusions and recommendations

This evaluation suggests that the aims of module are met in that the knowledge and understanding of emotional well-being for children and young people acquired through this module allows undergraduate students’ to apply their learning (of this topic) to their practice within the children’s workforce: thus bridging the ‘practice –theory gap’. Students acquired purposive knowledge. This evaluation supports the University strategic aims in providing a meaningful and nurturing / learning student experience and in raising employability and readiness for graduate work. Moreover, these findings will influence the teaching and learning strategy for the BA programme in Childhood and Youth and be used to support the School Teaching and Learning strategy. Finally the findings from this evaluation may be informative in contributing to policy decisions in planning the education of the future children and young peoples’ workforce.

The findings of the study suggest that there is a need to know what the *impact is for children and young people* in the learning experiences of the undergraduate students. This could also capture the point of view of the setting / work place. Evaluation and / or research of these points should take place. Furthermore, the evaluation has a potential wider impact in translating the strategies and

learning from this module to similar vocational professional education, for example in Teacher Education, where a need to teach emotional well-being has been identified. It is a recommendation that pilot studies be carried out for this.

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