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SYMPOSIUM SET I/21

FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Individual paper

CHAIR: PAUL WATLING
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Communities of practice, knowledge sharing and the experiences of early years professionals in the North East of England
DONALD SIMPSON, Teesside University, United Kingdom

In the context of recent reforms requiring professionals to work in new ways, the concept of ‘communities of practice’ is being advocated as an organising design through which previously split and hierarchical team working arrangements can be remodelled and transformed in English early years contexts. This is because the communities of practice model suggests an evolving, fluid and more collective team working reliant on the sharing of knowledge and expertise. This paper aims to explore evidence for the emergence of such team working through analysing data from a recent research project focusing upon Early Years Professionals (EYPs) in the North East of England. Findings from this research project exploring EYPs experiences have recently appeared in the European Early Childhood Education Research Journal and the Journal of Early Childhood Research. The research reported in this paper revolves around the concept of communities of practice and incorporates this with insights from a wider critical realist perspective. 1) Interpretive paradigm; 2) qualitative methodology; 3) phenomenological research design and semistructured interviews. Informed consent; confidentiality; anonymity of EYPs. The concept of communities of practice offers insights when used as a heuristic tool for researching workforce changes and knowledge management in early years contexts. But as a concept that can be practically applied to achieve new team working arrangements and knowledge sharing, the paper raises doubts regarding its transformative capacities and several challenges are identified. The paper offers insights for early years stakeholders about evolving team working and EYPs’ roles in knowledge sharing.

Keywords: communities of practice, early years professionals, knowledge sharing, multiprofessional working, team working

The Scottish early level teacher and professional voice
GRACE PATON, University of the West of Scotland, United Kingdom

The presentation explores the processes which allow student teachers to construct professional knowledge, professional values and become aware of their professional voice. The Scottish government aspires to “Extend the approaches which are used in pre-school into the early stages of primary, emphasising the importance of opportunities for children to learn through purposeful, well-planned play” (Review Group, 2004). Evidence from pre-school inspections has been positive about observed developmentally appropriate practice, but has identified a need to improve practice to empower children as learners. The introduction of a revised curriculum (Curriculum for Excellence) now expects early childhood centres to attend to subject-based outcomes and experiences, marking a shift from a holistic, developmental framework. The research examines student perception of practice informed by socio-cultural theory. Data collected from focus groups of teacher education students who had experienced contrasting approaches to learning about early childhood pedagogy will be compared. One cohort was subjected to a directed model of learning. The other engaged in collaborative approaches to learning using academic literature and research. Informed ethical consent was obtained and sensitivity shown to the power dynamic between students and lecturer. The ability to articulate professional knowledge and values appears to be related to the approaches to learning and teaching experienced by the students. Findings suggest that when teacher educators commit to a role where they socialise students as collaborative critics of policy and research, the professional voice of teacher students can emerge.

Keywords: professional voice, teacher education, socio-cultural theory, curriculum, Scotland