

REPORT FOR WVLLN RESEARCH PROJECT: Phase 1

WITH CITY OF BRISTOL COLLEGE

Presented by Isobel MacDougall: 16.01.2009

Supporting progression of BME students

into the Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years

“It was like learning in yet another language when I started the degree. I felt completely lost and other students didn’t seem as lost as me” (EAL student)

Abstract

This report documents the identified need for bilingual support staff to be qualified to degree level in order to attempt to raise the achievement levels of young children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) within Early Years education and care settings. Practitioners, employers, specialists in delivering English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Study Skills were interviewed to ascertain what skills, concepts and experiences are required for undergraduate study when using English as an additional language and having been educated within another culture. The findings demonstrated the need for a bridging course to prepare practitioners with EAL to study on the Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years (SEFDEY). In addition, the findings demonstrated that a bridging course alone may be insufficient and practitioners with EAL may need specific support throughout the course.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This research was based on the findings documented in the Interim Report dated 26 March 2008, and the continuing concern throughout the year with a very low percentage of applications for the Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years for September 2008 entry, from practitioners from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and EAL communities.
- 1.2. Also discussed in the Interim Report was the evaluation of the impact of SEFDEY, carried out by the DfES in 2006, which provided evidence of the positive impact of this qualification on both practitioners and settings (Snape,

Parfremment & Finch, 2006). It is important that all practitioners with relevant vocational qualifications have the opportunity to access the Foundation Degree, especially where it has been identified by employers that leaders from the BME/EAL communities would be beneficial to children and their families. The Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree was introduced as a work-based degree in response to research, which highlighted the importance of a highly qualified workforce required to raise the quality of provision within early years settings for education and care of children from birth to five years (Sylva et al: EPPE: 2004).

- 1.3. Interviews with past and current students with EAL proved to be more valuable than the use of questionnaires. It was possible to have on-going discussions as the research and plans for a bridging course were developing, based on good professional relationships.
- 1.4. Discussions with employers documented in the Interim report (26 March 2008) continued to be an important factor in the development of this study and further discussions with the HE unit and other specialist staff at the City of Bristol College provided the necessary specialist knowledge for developing a specific bridging course to ensure appropriate access to under-graduate study on a work-based programme.
- 1.5. Discussions with the Local Authority were important in ensuring that practitioners would be able to be released from their employment to study prior to application for the Graduate Leader Fund (available for those undergoing graduate or post-graduate study) to meet the targets for a graduate work-force.
- 1.6. It was considered essential that practitioners who were either from the BME community or using EAL should have access to a 6 week bridging course (Interim Report 26 March 2008) in order to understand some of the concepts and history in early years' education in England, acquire basic study skills and have language support through this time. This course will also provide opportunities to build relationships with staff and each other within a more secure environment of an early years setting before transferring to the college setting for the Foundation Degree in September 2009.
- 1.7. In September 2007, the government introduced the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). The role of this practitioner is to lead pedagogy within early years' settings. I consider that in locations where there is a reasonable percentage of children from BME communities and those with EAL, it is essential to have Early Years Professionals (EYP) from the BME/EAL communities both to support and

train staff and to work with families in the community. The Foundation Degree in Early Years (SEFDEY), designed for level 3 qualified practitioners, is the ideal route for EYPS and therefore, attracting suitable practitioners onto the degree is important.

2. Methodology

- 2.1. It was initially intended to use questionnaires with practitioners and employers, but using informal interviews over a period of time proved to be more beneficial to an investigation into the specific questions for this study. This enabled the establishment of positive professional relationships with the participants, which encouraged deeper probing into issues such as details of the difficulties some students faced in understanding concepts and requirements for assignments.
- 2.2. Telephone and email contact with employers was also on-going and time-efficient, but less satisfactory in terms of building relationships with settings and collaborative work in assessing training needs. However, this study was conducted during a time of much change for the particular early years settings involved in this study, and employers are under time constraints.
- 2.3. The advisory group is an essential focus group as this includes employers, trainers and staff from the local authorities. Key questions were raised at each meeting and as this was the forum for the initial question, it continues to be a reflective and pro-active source for data.
- 2.4. Case studies were used initially to ascertain some of the key issues around attracting and supporting practitioners from BME/EAL communities to study at graduate level. These case studies were students who have either completed or are currently on the Foundation Degree (SEFDEY). This method has provided the context and continuity of information specific to these practitioners but has been dependent on the good-will of students to give their own time for informal interviews. However, the case studies have been vital in noting the individual variety of support needs and issues for concern demonstrating that whilst a bridging course would be valuable, it is the on-going support of college staff, employers and a critical mentor that is likely to make the long-term difference to academic success and changing practice in the work-place.

3. Theme 1: Enabling curriculum

- 3.1. It is important to recognise that although a bridging course could support EAL students with accessing learning and assessment procedures on the foundation

degree, a more integrated approach to supporting students' differentiated learning needs as suggested by Cottrell (2001:43-63) in utilising the learning developmental model would be more effective in supporting students as life-long learners. This may well also provide the students with skills for continuing professional development both for themselves and for supporting others and would be valuable for any students going on to achieve Early Years Professional Status. Further investigation into this model is not possible within the remit of this study but could be considered when developing the foundation degree. However, the current programme for SEFDEY offered at the City of Bristol College includes a Study Skills programme each week over the 2-year duration of the degree which is '*delivered within the subject, using course specific materials*' (Cottrell:2001:47) and planned to systematically develop the students reflective, critical thinking skills and strategies for action research within their workplace. This ensures that '*reflection, problem solving, risk taking and professional development are built into the learning culture and rewarded through assessment and grading*' (ibid). Hopefully, this model will guarantee an inclusive and positive experience for students coming from the EAL bridging course onto SEFDEY and provide valuable opportunities for professional development for all students in strategies to support all children including BME/EAL.

- 3.2. It has been noted that many of the practitioners with EAL have completed their level 3 qualification through the NVQ route and therefore this transition from NVQ assessment to Foundation Degree study needs to be evaluated and addressed. The process of building a portfolio of evidence is a valuable skill which can be utilised throughout a practitioner's employment. This involves developing reflective skills but does not necessarily encourage critical thinking skills which are necessary for analytical skills. "*I knew what I did and could document that but I had never thought about why I did things or made connections with any theory or research. I had never thought I could challenge ideas before. It was really hard to think differently.*" (EAL graduate). This needs to be considered when designing an appropriate study skills curriculum so that students feel confident about academic writing protocols.
- 3.3. Dispositions for learning (Carr: 2001, Claxton:1999, 2002) and defined by Katz (1993) as '*a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal*' are critical habits for life long learning and encourage ownership of and taking responsibility for learning. These are recognised within the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum as important skills for children to develop within the first few years of life. '*It seems timely to include*

dispositions among important outcomes of education at every level' (ibid) to help students to develop the right frame of mind for learning. These same skills are essential tools for learning for adults and need to be embedded within the bridging course and supported through the study skills programme

- 3.4. Mature students who are returning to learning or who have not had the opportunity to develop academic reading and writing skills need to be supported in developing key skills to support learning and assessment in Higher Education. For students who have completed much of their education within another country or culture, this may involve a paradigm shift in their approach to learning. The dispositions discussed above will be valuable, but planning to study, time management, reading for purpose, note taking, academic writing genres, planning, referencing and use of ICT are also necessary. The bridging course will not attempt to cover all aspects of study skills but be more concerned with building confidence and a 'can do' culture amongst the student cohort and knowledge of where to look for help. It is important that this course is planned in conjunction with the Access to HE Study Skills course, already offered at the City of Bristol College (in September/October for 3 Saturdays) for students who have been offered places on Foundation Degrees. It is envisaged that students attending the bridging course could also attend the Access to HE course to further develop their skills and confidence in the weeks immediately prior to the start of the Foundation Degree. Students from the research cohort who had attended the Access to HE course had found it valuable but felt they had needed a longer course to feel more confident as students. *"The Access to Study Skills course was excellent and the tutor was so good. She really seemed to understand me, but it was not enough time – I needed more time to understand how to do things. The other students seemed to be OK. It was just me."* (EAL degree student). However, they did build a relationship with the tutor and one student had continued to have support from this tutor during the first term of the foundation degree.
- 3.5. Discussions are on-going with specialist staff on the most effective strategy for supporting language development to ensure that all students have attained L2 language skills before applying for the foundation degree (SEFDEY). One school of thought is to teach English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) within the subject specialist context so that students make connections with specific jargon and educational concepts related to early years' education and care. Alternatively, ESOL can be taught as a discrete subject. Whichever strategy is adopted for the bridging course, individual tutorials as well as group sessions will

be important to ensure that individual needs are identified and met. Ideally, each student would be allocated a mentor to support them throughout their training, from bridging course to the completion of the foundation degree. Preferably, these mentors would be graduates in early years' education with EAL who could offer language support as well as the role of critical friend.

- 3.6. Interviews with students in the research cohort highlighted the difficulties some had experienced in understanding some of the key concepts of learning in the early years, such as learning through play, discourses of childhood and subject specific knowledge relating to early years education and care. *"My education was so different and attitudes towards children are different around the world. Even though I have been working in England for several years, it is still hard to get your head round different ideas, especially when you haven't grown up with them"* (EAL graduate). It was clear that jargon busting, an introduction to the historical background to early years' education and the development of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF:2007) would be a helpful foundation for future study as well as the opportunity to explore the differences in their own educational experiences. Whilst these students are experienced practitioners, they had little opportunity to understand fully why they were doing what they were doing and the pedagogical principles underpinning early years' practice.
- 3.7. Whilst recruitment for this bridging course for experienced practitioners from the BME/EAL is open to all relevant applicants, it is likely, given the current profile of practitioners within the early years' sector, that the majority will be women, most of whom will have families, all of whom will be on low incomes. It cannot be ignored that by engaging in degree level study, these women may face issues that will affect their public and private lives, which is sometimes construed as being potentially disruptive, particularly in their personal relationships (Edwards:1993) – the 'Educating Rita' syndrome - as women are empowered through higher education. *"I never ever imagined that I would be able to do a degree. I have changed so much in so many ways. I want to go on and complete the Honours year and then maybe become a teacher. It's hard for my family to adjust to the idea but it's good for them too"* (EAL SEFDEY graduate). It is important that personal tutors are aware of the possible impact of this on women from diverse cultural backgrounds. Unrecognised, this could be a negative factor within the hidden curriculum – identified and acknowledged; it can be discussed and managed.

4. Theme 2: Progression through APEL

- 4.1. This has not been addressed through this report, but may well need to be considered, depending on the experience of applicants. It is envisaged that this may become more of an issue as more recent arrivals to Bristol may choose to work with young children, having qualified as professionals in other disciplines in their home country.

5. Theme 3: Employer engagement

- 5.1. The outcomes for children from BME/EAL communities vary across geographical areas within the city:

'In North 2, East Central 3 and South 4, BME pupils outperformed non-BME pupils in all subjects

- *Overall, BME pupils achieved 4.9% lower than non-BME pupils in Numbers as Labels for Counting, 12% lower in Reading and 9.3% lower in Writing*
- *Black Somali pupils achieved the lowest score in Numbers as Labels for Counting and Reading and Chinese pupils achieved the lowest score in Writing*
- *The Mixed and White groups achieved above the Bristol average in all subjects, however, the combined Black group achieved nearly 15% below the Bristol average in Reading.'* (Bristol: 2008: Equalities Impact Assessment) and for children with English as an additional language,

'EAL pupils achieved above the Bristol average in Numbers as Labels for Counting in North 2 and South 3, Reading in North 3 and Writing in South 3 The EAL differential was widest in Reading.'(*ibid*).

This demonstrates the differences across the Local Authority and suggests the importance of working closely with the Local Authority and employers to identify areas of specific need. Meetings and telephone conversations within individual heads and managers of centres has been essential for identifying settings with higher percentages of children needing support.

- 5.2. While there are different opinions within research on the importance of employing bi-lingual, bi-cultural staff to support children from BME/EAL communities, it is important to work closely with employers to ensure that training opportunities match perceived training needs within the sector. Employers will be consulted over the recruitment of students for the bridging course.

- 5.3. All students on the SEFDEY programme are employed as early years practitioners and therefore need supply cover to be released for study. The Local Authority has agreed to provide funding for supply cover to release BME/EAL students on the bridging course for 2009, six days over a six week period.
- 5.4. The six-week bridging course will take place in a Children's Centre in central Bristol. This will provide a more familiar and work-based location and a smooth transition to college for the foundation degree, as they will have made some relationships with staff and students on the short course. Students within the research cohort commented on their apprehension towards attending a college site where they felt intimidated by younger students and this is corroborated by research carried out by Owen (2006) amongst Somali young people in Bristol. Whilst this research cohort was between the ages of 8 and 14 years, some of their concerns for safety and fears of harassment were intimated by one member of the study group for this report.
- 5.5. It is considered important to involve employers and Local Authority specialist staff as visiting speakers to ensure genuine collaborative training and embedding the principles and philosophy underpinning early years' education and care within the sector. Employers, the early years' consultant for Bristol and relevant staff from the Local Authority have been involved in the design, implementation and assessment of the foundation degree (SEFDEY) at the City of Bristol College from its inception, six years ago.
- 5.6. Marketing the course will be done through an Employer event, sending out flyers to all settings and primarily, discussions with individual employers within the East/Central zone and identified areas in Bristol.

6. Sustainability

- 6.1. The hypothesis driving this study is that well qualified bi-lingual support staff will raise the achievement of children from BME/EAL communities in Bristol, especially the East/Central zone of the city. If support for access to the foundation degree for practitioners with EAL is not available each year, there is a limited chance of ensuring a continuous addition of graduate leaders with EAL to the workforce. It is important to consider issues of sustainability.
- 6.2. Funding will be the main issue each year as students will need supply cover in order to be released. Also, the course will need to be funded to cover the venue, staffing and resources.

- 6.3. Validating the course would provide students with a certificate, which would be valuable if they were unable to continue with the foundation degree.
- 6.4. Mentors are key critical friends and research demonstrates the positive impact of a good mentor. *"I would never have achieved as well or completed this course without my mentor. She has always supported me and been there for me"* (SEFDEY student); *"My mentor knows what it's like to study, work full-time and look after a family. She understands what I am going through and helps me put things in perspective"* (SEFDEY graduate). As practitioners with EAL complete the foundation degrees, they will be able to become mentors to new recruits, however, without funding or an accredited continuing professional development award, it will be increasingly difficult to find suitable mentors. This is becoming a difficulty currently on SEFDEY as the Children's Workforce Development Council no longer provides funding for mentors.

7. Proposed course

7.1. Suggested programme for Bridging Course for SEFDEY for EAL access

Aims: to prepare practitioners with a level 3 qualification and EAL to apply for Foundation Degree

Learning outcomes:

- to know where to access information relevant to the course
- to develop confidence in spoken and written English
- to recognise the skills and competencies required to study at HE level
- to know relevant background information in Early Years education and care
- to meet other practitioners with similar learning needs

Suggested timing of day:

9.30 – 11.00: Study skills

11.00- 11.15: Break

11.15 - 1.15: Background to Early Years care & education

1.15 - 2.00: Lunch

2.00 – 3.00: ESOL support & tutorials

Proposed staffing:

- Regular Study skills tutor
- Regular ESOL tutor
- Course tutor
- Some visiting speakers (employers and Early Years Advisory team)

Date	Study Skills	Background to Early Years provision in UK	ESOL support & tutorials
	Reading for purpose	History/background of education for young children in UK	
	Extracting meaning from text	Discourses of childhoods – raising children Jargon busting	
	Planning & time management	Philosophy of children learning through play	
	Note taking and different writing formats	Looking at curriculum documents used in England	
	Writing essays	Social policy in Early Years – Children’s Centres	
	The nuts and bolts of good writing	Equality of opportunity, diversity and culture	

- 7.2. Regular, informal meetings to be arranged each month to sustain relationships and support students until SEFDEY starts in September 2009.

8. Key questions raised by study:

- 8.1. What are the specific needs for mature students on a work-based degree?
- 8.2. Do children from BME communities and children & their families with EAL need specialist support from BME/EAL graduates?
- 8.3. Do we need specifically trained & qualified Bi-lingual support staff rather than up-skilling practitioners from BME/EAL communities? This question needs further detailed research.
- 8.4. What are the mutual benefits for all students if 'the learning developmental model' (Cottrell: 2001) continues to be integrated into the degree programme?

9. References

9.1 Glossary

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Science
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status (EYPS)
SEFDEY	Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years

9.2 Reference list

- Bristol Children & Young People's Services: 2008: Equalities Impact Assessment: Bristol LA
- Carr, M: 2001: Assessment in Early Childhood Settings: Learning Stories: London: Paul Chapman Publishing
- Claxton, G: 1999: Wise up: The challenge of lifelong learning: London: Bloomsbury
- Claxton, G: 2002: Building learning power: Helping young people become better learners: Bristol, England: TLO
- Cottrell, S: 2001: Teaching Study Skills and Supporting Learning: Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan

DCFS: 2007: The Early Years Foundation Stage: QCA

Edwards, R: 1993: Mature women students – Separating or Connecting Family and Education: London: Taylor Francis

Katz, L. (1993). Dispositions as educational goals. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. [ED363454]

Owen, G: 2006: Somali Children in Bristol: Achieving the Five Outcomes from 'Every Child Matters' Summary Version: Barnardo's

Snape, Parfremment & Finch, 2006: Evaluation of the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree: Findings from the Final Student Survey: National Centre for Social Research: Research Report No. 838: Nottingham: DfES Publications

Sylva, K; Siraj-Blatchford, I et al (2004) Effective Provision of Pre-School Education: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/schools/ecpe/epe/> accessed 24.03.08