

**Examining practice: the perceptions of learners
and employers on a work-based Early Years
Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree**

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I certify that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not concurrently submitted for any degree other than the Doctorate in Education (EdD) of the University of Greenwich. I also declare that this work is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise stated.

Student (signature)

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Abstract

This research investigates whether work-based learning facilitates the development of practical skills and theoretical insights by early years practitioners. Foundation degrees symbolise both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity relates to creating a new vocational qualification which has work-based learning central to its delivery, in attempting to meet the demands of a skilled workforce necessitated by a shifting economy. The challenge is to form workable and sustainable partnerships with employers, Higher Educational Institutes and Further Education Colleges in developing an integrated approach to work-based learning. This thesis reviews the economic arguments and motivations that have led to the establishment of Foundation degrees and despite qualification inflation and continuing budgetary constraints; they are viewed optimistically through the perceptions of employers, students and policy makers.

This research uses a mixed method approach involving three Further Education Colleges, learners and employers drawing on data gathered from questionnaires and interviews to examine the role of the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree with particular emphasis on the role of employers in facilitating work-based learning and work based assessments. The impact of factors such as pastoral support and the inclusion of study skills in building self-confidence and improving academic writing skills amongst students especially those who have taken a break from education or those who have had negative experiences at school are highlighted. This research analyses the issues faced by employers, learners and Further Education Colleges, in accommodating work-based learning and considers whether the Government needs to reassess the demands placed on the partnerships and reconsider a more supportive package in order to make it a viable and successful qualification.

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GLOSSARY

BMJ	British Medical Journal
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CWDC	Children’s Workforce Development Council
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EEL	Effective Early Learning
ECM	Every Child Matters
EWTD	European Working Time Directive
EY	Early Years
EYFD	Early Years Foundation Degree
EYSEFD	Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree
FEC	Further Education College
FE	Further Education
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FdF	Foundation Degree Forward

FDTF	Foundation Degree Task Force
GMC	General Medical Council
GTP	Graduate Teacher Programme
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEIST	Higher Education Information Services Trust
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistants
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
MA	Modern Apprenticeship
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development.

OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
QAA	Quality Assurance Authority
RCGP	Royal College of General Practitioners
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
RTP	Registered Teacher Programme
SEEC	South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
SEN	Special Educational Need
SHO	Senior House Officer
SSCs	Sector Skills Councils
TDA	Training Development Agency
TTA	Teacher Training Agency
SMEs	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work-Based learning

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study emerged from the experience of the researcher as a course tutor on the Higher National Diploma (HND) Qualification in Early Years. The central observation was that where students had the opportunity and experience of drawing on real life experiences of working with children, they were able to use this directly to exemplify theory in comparison to those who had minimal experience. The advantage to learners who worked with children was that they appeared to connect the learning they gained from working with young children within a work based context to an understanding of child related issues at a deeper level. Their work in class was characterised by the ability to relate practice to theory. In presentations they were confident, spoke with authority and appeared 'bigger'. What was of particular interest was that the learners themselves held no sense of themselves as knowledgeable practitioners until they participated in a videoed learning exercise in which they were asked to review and comment on their performance in presenting a self-selected topic related to their work which they enjoyed. What resulted was a memorable class. It was evident that some learners were totally taken aback at seeing and listening to themselves. The boost to their confidence was tangible. The class discussion revolved around the extent of their knowledge, their 'connectedness' to their work and the constant learning and adapting that occurs within the workplace. What became clear was the value of learning theory within a work based learning environment and how underrated the professional skills and experience were in an academic setting.

A programme evaluation of the HND highlighted that entry to the programme was based solely on academic qualifications and did not accommodate individuals with relevant work based experience. Additionally, although the HND course required only level 3 qualifications to gain entry, the assessments on the HND programme were heavily biased towards a theoretical understanding that favoured individuals with competent academic skills associated with formal education.

Anecdotal evidence from lecturers, employers and learners at the institution and other local colleges suggested that the degree offer in Early Years might fall short of providing a comprehensive programme meeting the needs of all learners. Some learners who had already achieved degree qualifications were conversant with many child development theories but lacked practical experience of implementing this knowledge in the workplace. Conversely, some learners had much practical experience of working with young children but little knowledge of theories to support their work, despite the fact that the Childhood Studies Degrees attempted to address this shortfall.

The opportunity of being involved in an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree (EYSEFD) being launched in the researcher's institution was seen as an opportunity to investigate how effective Work Based Learning (WBL) might be in training practitioners and the role and inclusion of pastoral support and study skills in not only facilitating WBL but also developing academic related skills. The rationale for this study was to analyse how well Foundation degrees, with their WBL component, met the needs of learners and employers.

The decision was made to focus on the EYSEFD being run at the researcher's institution and two other partner colleges. As a lecturer, the researcher was aware that there had been an increasing awareness of the positive impact of effective early years education with various Government policies and initiatives such as the *National Childcare Strategy*, (DfES, 1998) and *Sure Start* (2002). It was recognised that although early years practitioners collectively encompass a wide spectrum of experience, formal qualifications which incorporate relevant WBL in this sector remain low and there is a need to consider more effective and appropriate training and qualifications (DfES, 2002b; Cameron et al. 2002; Clemens et al. 2005, 2006; Hevey, 2007). In recognition of the importance of the role of childcare workers in the economy, the Government introduced and initiated policies with a view to increasing the numbers of qualified and skilled childcare workers (Bertram and Pascale, 2000; Blenkin and Yue, 1994; Cameron, 1997; Cameron et al. 2001; CWDC, 2006, 2007; DfEE, 1998; Rolfe, 2005). Until recently (2004), there was no mechanism for transfer of qualifications between the many childcare occupations despite shared common skills and knowledge.

The research undertaken seeks to analyse the effectiveness within the EYSEFD through a micro-study of three Further Education Colleges (FECs); a sample of employers and learners drawn from three FECs during the period 2003 – 2006 and asks the following questions:

- What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?
- What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL?

It is proposed that this study makes an original contribution to an under researched area through the examination of the experiences of learners and employers in accommodating WBL within their practice. In analysing how WBL influences professional practice, the study demonstrates how WBL can act as a conduit bringing together theory and practice and facilitating learning.

The following chapter presents a critical analysis of the literature in order to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical basis for the research questions presented above.

CHAPTER 2

The Role of Work Based Learning in Practice Development

Chapter 2 examines the wider context of WBL prior to focusing on early years. This chapter weaves through the importance and professional impact of a range of professions such as architecture, medicine and Teacher Training before examining the historical and current context of early years. The narrative focuses on the changes that were initiated and implemented in an attempt to professionalise the workforce. It concludes with the introduction of Foundation Degrees which were perceived to address the academic gap within the labour market by addressing shortages in particular skills.

WBL has traditionally been used as an integral part of many professional training programmes. In particular, the WBL element in the professional preparation for architecture, medicine and teaching will be outlined before focussing more closely on the preparation of early years professionals. There are, of course, many professions which have WBL embedded in their programme of study. These three examples, and many of those listed in table 2.1, have been chosen to represent a range of professional preparation in which WBL is an integral and essential component in gaining the qualifications necessary for professional practice. In many of these professions post-qualification Continuing Professional Development (CPD) continues to be an integral part of on-going professional practice, and this often takes the form of WBL.

2.1 Work Based Learning: The wider Context

Defining WBL is often difficult as it encompasses a plethora of different terms such as workplace learning; work related learning; work experience and problem based learning (Beany, 2005; Connor, 2005). Gray (2001:4) defines it as 'the means through which a discipline is delivered it is a mechanism for learning' and discusses three types of WBL which are learning for work; learning at work and learning through work. Boud and Symes (2000:14) differentiate between work based and work place learning:

Workplace learning occurs on a day-to-day basis at work as employees acquire new skills or develop new approaches to solving problems. No formal educational recognition normally accrues to such learning....work-based learning gives academic recognition to these opportunities, when suitably planned and represented.

The link between training and economic success has been documented by many authors (Boud and Solomon, 2001; Guile and Young, 2001; Lohman, 2000; QAA, 2004). Giddens (2000) and Beck (1999) feel that the instability of the economic environment has led to placing great emphasis on the knowledge society and learning at work. The sociological aspect of WBL can imply that some employees may have greater access to training and learning opportunities leading Billett (2005:944) to comment that:

The kinds of occupational practice denied courses and certification are often low paid and characterised as being low skill and occupied by disadvantaged groups...Finding means to legitimately and authoritatively recognise skills acquired through work- hold the prospect of providing just arrangements for those otherwise disadvantaged workers as well as those requiring recognition throughout their working lives.

Rainbird et al. (2004:51) argue that formal learning contributes to workers' sense of empowerment and self esteem and that 'formal qualifications are significant in acting as filters to internal organizational markets'. Beany (2005:6) feels that WBL is situationally and socially shaped and emphasises that 'at the heart of work-based learning is the assumption that experiential learning is a powerful and effective pedagogy'. Lave and Wenger (1991) develop the theme of situated learning by focusing on the anthropological view of learning within communities. Critics of this view (Billett, 2002a, 2002b and Guile and Young, 2001) feel that the focus on learning is narrow and the underlying assumption is that learning occurs in a linear way leaving no room for learning through reflection. Similarly, Tynjala (2009) agrees stating that there is no room to question the practices occurring in the community, and the learning that occurs is reproductive rather than transformative. Billett's (2002b) theory of 'Workplace learning as Co-participation' concentrates upon the specific factors (historical, social and cultural) that lead people to engage with workplace learning and stresses the important part played by mentors in the promotion of learning.

Boud and Solomon (2000) point out that although learning and work may be coincident they are not similar as they have a different focus and goals. They feel that work is primarily geared towards production of goods or services whilst learning can be viewed as the acquisition of knowledge or the capacity to gain knowledge which may not be aligned to the organization's long term or short term goals. Research conducted by Murphy and Taylor (2008) stressed that although learners were enthused by the new perspectives which they encountered in their modules they often faced contradictions when reconciling their educational experience with the demands or the objectives of their industry whilst Havnes (2008:109) candidly comments that 'the institutional boundaries between education and work represent a threat to learning to become a professional'.

The definitions explored above show that it is not possible to strictly adhere to one definition. For the purpose of this study the definition of WBL is taken from the South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC, 2002:4) which defines WBL as learning that is:

negotiated, defined and understood by all parties, adequate opportunities and support are provided for learning to occur, and the achievement of the intended outcomes are demonstrated and assessed.

The table that follows gives a synopsis of the entry routes, training and extent of WBL in a range of professions. The first column 'initial entry to the profession' summarises the initial qualification that a non-professional undertakes to begin professional practice. The column 'further formal training' outlines the study beyond the initial qualification that allows an individual to take up professional practice. The column 'WBL' notes whether there are any WBL requirements that develop from initial degree to final professional practice.

Table 2.1: Routes to professional practice

Profession	Initial entry to the profession	Further formal training	WBL
Actuary	A graduate in a numerate subject such as science, mathematics or economics.	Through the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries.	All the training is in the form of WBL, with exams taken in four stages over 6 years
Adult Guidance worker	A degree usually in a social science discipline.	NVQ level 4 in Advice and Guidance for those already working in guidance related fields.	No formal requirement
Air Traffic Controller	National Air Traffic Services run training for 18 months at The College of Air Traffic Control.	On the job training where assessment is continuous.	WBL is continuous
Barrister	Degree in law	One year full time or two years part time at an Inn of Court, then a pupillage shadowing a barrister for six months	WBL is an integral part of the programme following initial graduation
Cardiac physiologist	Degree in clinical physiology. In the third or fourth year an entire year is spent at placement	No formal requirement	No formal requirement
Chartered Engineer	Degree in engineering	Chartered Engineer status through WBL programme.	No formal requirement after graduation

Economist	Degree in economics	No formal requirement	No formal requirement
Upholsterer	FE course such as City and Guilds, or Advanced Apprenticeship	No formal requirement	WBL with block placements at college
Sommelier	Diploma through Wine and Spirit Education Trust	Entry to Masters of Wine or Master Sommelier, require five years professional experience.	extensive WBL to gain an understanding of wine production and tasting
Rangers/ Wardens	Degree or HNDs in environmental or land based studies	No formal requirement	Almost the entire qualification is structured around WBL.

Table 2.1 identifies a range of professions and the initial qualification that is required to enter professional practice. It is interesting to note that adult guidance workers have a number of ways of entering professional practice, though it is normal to complete an initial degree in a social science. However there is no requirement for a profession-specific certificate, and no formal structure for ongoing career work based learning. In stark contrast, an actuary is required to complete a degree, and then study a clearly defined graduate programme with regular examinations over a period of several years.

Some professions will not admit a graduate into professional practice until they have undertaken a period of supervised study. An engineer for example can practice upon graduation, but acceptance within the profession and career advancement requires a largely WBL programme to achieve Chartered Engineer status. And while the economist can begin practice immediately after graduation without further study, the actuary will have to study for some years: and the sommelier cannot even begin a Masters level programme until he or she has completed five years of successful professional practice. Qualifications for upholsterers and wardens are offered only in FE colleges whilst Air Traffic Controllers gain their knowledge and expertise through WBL at an airport using a simulated environment. The table highlights the importance

of WBL across a range of professions both which are academic and vocational, but also demonstrates that WBL is not universally required. Not mentioned in the table, but worth noting is that many professions accept mature-aged candidates, and in increasingly rare instances it remains possible to gain professional status through work experience without formally academic qualification.

The table highlights that a barrister undergoes training that includes successful completion of a degree in law and professional registration dependent on additional study at the Inns of Court, working with a firm of solicitors and barristers and for which a substantial fee is charged. The final movement to a barrister requires a form of apprenticeship to a practising barrister. The extent of WBL required to become a barrister is in considerable contrast to the study and WBL of (say) an economist and that a professional economist needs only an initial degree which is unlikely to have any component of WBL. Moreover, the economist is not required to undertake any further post-graduate study.

2.1.1 Architecture

WBL has always been an essential part in the professional education of architects. In the nineteenth century in the UK, trainee architects acquired their understanding of the profession by becoming the articled pupils of an established architect. The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), founded in 1834, oversaw standardization of quality and curriculum delivery (Thompson, 1968), the curriculum included a practical element of learning through experience.

At present, WBL is an integral part of the year-long RIBA course that enables learners to develop an interest in a particular field of architecture. At the conclusion of this year of study learners are expected to complete a project on an aspect of architectural practice. This can include, for example, a study of a building under construction, documenting progress and the solutions to problems arising during its construction (Russell, 2004).

Research by Roberts (2005:2) on the benefits of WBL for trainee architects concentrated on the positive aspects of learning in this way. Learners commented on their development of communication and team-working skills, increased knowledge of

Information Technology, and the benefits of learning through observation, work shadowing and trial and error. They noted that there was:

No place for arrogance: '...arrogance comes from being at university where you can do anything you want and [then you] walk into a practice ... I think that's what hit me, that it's not all about doing what you want and you've got to work with a team'.

Working together: 'It is different from group work at the university because there is a lot more conversation, rather than a clash of personalities. People are a lot more task orientated. It's a lot simpler' (2002:2).

Learners also recommended changes to curriculum delivery that included changing the emphasis on the theoretical aspects of some modules as they would be better placed within the WBL element of the training.

The Architects' Review Board issues a code of conduct for architects and reviews it frequently. The code is intended as guidance for architects in their professional lives, and actions can be taken against those who misuse the code. In this way, the integrity of the profession is maintained, and members of the public can be confident that in hiring an architect for their building project, they are securing the services of a genuine professional (ARB, 2010). Moreover, RIBA requires that all registered architects undergo at least 9.5 hours per year from the RIBA's prescribed core curriculum of continuing professional development (CPD) and 15.5 hours of professional development in other relevant subjects (RIBA, 2009).

2.1.2 Medicine

At the turn of the nineteenth century, medicine was an unregulated profession and there was great variation in the qualifications of practitioners and the availability of WBL opportunities (Peterson, 1978). By the end of the century, medical training facilities were forced to upgrade their standards due to pressure from within some parts of the medical community (Youngson, 1979). Today in the UK the study of medicine is usually undertaken through an undergraduate course at medical school which lasts between four and six years, or through a graduate medical school programmes where students have a degree in an allied discipline such as biological sciences (MMC, 2006; McCrorie, 2002). On completion of this period of study trainee

doctors follow a prescribed training route where they work as pre-registration house officers in a hospital, which then leads to full registration with the General Medical Council (GMC). It is at this point that doctors choose between further specialist training as a Senior House Officer, then a Specialist Registrar to become a consultant or they enter General Practice Training to become a General Practitioner. Throughout these programmes there is great emphasis on WBL and trainee doctors spend half their time engaged in it, with the amount increasing as they progress (Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), Curriculum Statement, 2005). Of the 238,500 doctors in the UK about 58% are men and 42% women (GMC, 2010) and all are registered medical professionals. This registration gives them licence to practice and holds them accountable for delivering professional and ethical service and care towards their patients; without professional registration they are not allowed to practice.

Lately, there has been a renewed focus on WBL for trainee doctors, and authors Bulstode and Bell (1993:531-532) have observed that Senior House Officers (SHOs) were like a

lost tribe not holding any post long enough to be worth training, and disenfranchised... performing the tasks that no other doctor wants to do, and providing a 24 hour, 7 day a week service .

At the Conference of Post Graduate Medical Deans (1995) the views of Bulstode and Bell were highlighted with regards to the increased workload that was gradually eroding work based informal learning opportunities. In 2002 the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, published a consultation document which outlined proposed changes to the Senior House Officer Grade (Donaldson, 2002). SHOs were expected to develop their competence through working in a range of situations which would enable them to build their professional expertise, work and make judgements under pressure and develop an understanding of cultural, societal and organisational issues.

The controversial proposals recommended a new training framework where doctors enter a two year foundation programme after graduation followed by broad-based specialist training programmes. In addition to these changes the total hours worked by junior doctors has fallen to 48 hours a week following the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) in 2009. Research conducted by Anne Mc Bride (2004) outlined the

anxieties felt by junior doctors, which include fewer opportunities for training, a reduction in salaries and considerable disruption to their rotas whilst Lynn (2004) argued that the lack of training opportunities for junior doctors might mean closure or merging hospitals.

The Good Medical Practice guide states:

Good doctors make the care of their patients their first concern: they are competent, keep their knowledge and skills up to date, establish and maintain good relationships with patients and colleagues are honest and trustworthy, and act with integrity.

The Department of Health (HMSO, 1993:22) emphasised the need and importance of supervision and mentoring and states that:

It is central to the process of learning and to the expansion of the scope of practice and should be seen as the means for encouraging self assessment and analytical and reflective skills.

Within the medical context WBL creates opportunities to gain knowledge and experience of working with patients and matching theory to practice. For example, in primary care practice trainee doctors can develop ethics and value based practice in dealing with patients and their families and discuss their reflections with other doctors and mentors. These discussions and resultant reflections with other professionals assist trainee doctors to develop a framework for problem solving. This framing helps them to develop what Schön (1987:22) terms as:

the kinds of professional competence practitioners' display in unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice.

WBL can take many forms in medical education. For example, in case analysis medical records and case notes are reviewed in order to help identify learning areas for trainees and as a means of developing professional practice, while the more general sitting-in involves the mentor sitting in with the trainee during consultation and then providing feedback.

The introduction of the EWTD appears to have resulted in trainees feeling unsupported due to shortened periods in placement and a lack of regular contact with their mentors leading to a lessening of reflective practice (MEE, 2010). As one trainee commented:

you spend time getting to know a junior doctor and shadowing them... to find they've gone to nights or time off and you have to start that relationship all over again (MEE, 2010:7).

This is worrying as professionalism and a sense of vocation are important aspects of encouraging standards, pride in the work and the belief that when dealing with people doctors must make judgements which will help the patient regardless of other constraints. We see then that WBL has been an integral part of medical education for many years, but there is a pressure at present on the availability of WBL for young doctors as they pursue their pre-registration program brought about through the EWTD. The importance of both WBL and CPD continues to be recognised by the medical profession. For example, the website for the British Medical Journal (BMJ, 2009:1) states:

CPD is a continuing learning process that complements formal undergraduate and postgraduate education and training. CPD requires doctors to maintain and improve their standards across all areas of their practice' and 'it should also encourage and support specific changes in practice and career development.

2.1.3 Teacher Training

WBL has traditionally formed an essential component of Teacher Training courses. No formal training route existed prior to the Education Act 1902 and teachers were trained through mentoring by practitioners. Since 1902 teacher training has been recognized as a form of Higher Education (HE) and this enabled the LEAs (Local Education Authority) to make available secondary schools for the practical training of teachers (Gillard, 2007). Over the decades there have been a variety of programmes leading to a teaching qualification which have varied in numbers of years of study, and in content. All programmes however have had a high proportion of periods where trainee teachers spent time in classrooms during their initial training being

mentored by both the classroom teacher and a tutor from the college or university and WBL has always been a part of teacher preparation.

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) was established in September 1994 to fund Teacher Training, to improve its quality and to contribute to raising the standards of teaching (National Archives, 2008). The number of learners in initial teaching programmes rose from 29,510 in 2000/2001 to 41,980 in 2004/5 (DfES, 2006). The TTA not only increased the numbers of teacher trainees, but also provided new routes into teaching beyond the traditional undergraduate degree in education/teaching, and the post-degree PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education). There are now a number of ways of gaining a teaching qualification, which include the Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Employment Based Training and School Centred Initial Training routes. Most trainees are full time learners, but part-time and distance learning options are possible. All programs have large elements of WBL with primary trainees spending at least 18 weeks on school placements and secondary trainees spending at least 24 weeks on placements. A particularly popular route appears to be the employment based GTP (Graduate Teaching Practice) where the whole program takes the form of WBL and the 1,790 trainees following this route in 2000/2001 increased to 7,168 in 2006/2007 (DfES, 2006; TDA, 2006a).

In all of the above routes WBL is an important aspect as it gives trainees an understanding of matching theory to practice, observing other teachers and reflecting on their own practice both inside and outside of the classroom. WBL training opportunities in schools are an essential part of teacher education as they offer the trainees opportunities for professional growth and development. Trainees acquire knowledge about pupils; the different strategies that can be used for learning; routine tasks in teaching and the development of meta-cognition, differentiated and context specific problem solving skills. Ashby et al. (2008) argue for the usefulness of WBL an aspect supported by trainee teachers who noted that the placement in the school facilitated their understanding of 'real school life'. The trainees felt that theoretical underpinning of knowledge was important however, they gained in confidence, knowledge and understanding of children in a school environment. Moreover, WBL provided access to observing a range of teaching practice and they learnt to differentiate what worked with particular learners.

In order for WBL to be effective it is important to place trainees 'where good practice is the norm, and where sufficient guidance can be given to trainees' (McCrone Committee, 2000, para 3.5). Guidance from mentors and other staff enable the trainee to increase their sense of belonging and participation within the teaching community and develop their professional identity. As Van Huizen et al. (2005:274) have noted:

participation involves being drawn into a setting that includes a programme directed to the realization of values and goals, forms of social interaction and co-operation in an institutional context, and the use of cultural resources.

Dewhurst and McMurtry (2006:166-167) highlighted the importance of belonging for teacher trainees, as the quote below illustrates:

you don't have to worry if you've taken someone's place or have to act as a pack horse for days on end', whilst another wished to 'feel part of the team, even if it is temporary'.

Flintoff (2008:53) suggested that the school placement was the most rewarding aspect of training however there is the danger of perpetuating stereotypes. For example a PE trainee who could not swim very well said:

I felt kind of funny doing the swimming module. There's a stereotype of black people who can't really swim and I was a terrible swimmer, but I was perpetuating that stereotype.

It is important to highlight the role of the personal tutor within the WBL context as this individual acts in an important mentoring capacity enabling the student to reflect and understand the WBL experience (Ashby et al 2008). Trainees reported that seeing their tutors on a weekly basis allows them to talk about a range of personal and professional issues and ensures continuity. Engaging in reflection enables them to make the changes needed to improve their classroom practice or understanding of curriculum. For example, trainee teachers might find that they frequently have to adjust their Scheme of Work if their class did not grasp a particular topic. Zeichner and Liston (1996:9) refer to reflection as a 'way of being a teacher'. Both the value of the personal tutor and the need for reflection for professional development demonstrate the value of WBL.

And it is not only in England that WBL is valued in teacher preparation. In France since 1991 Institutes Universitaires de Formation de Maîtres have replaced the earlier Teacher Training centres and have become the main route into teaching. Trainee teachers attend two years at the Institute: the second year devoted to WBL in classrooms where trainees are paid a training salary. Teachers have the status of civil servants and entrance to the final phase of training depends on competitive public examinations. The level of performance in these examinations determines teachers' pay and grade structures (BBC, 2000).

The above examples demonstrate the importance of WBL, the extensive training which leads to the licence to practice and the focus on CPD which give these professions status. Furthermore, this level of training and WBL can lead to long term professional commitment and the sense of being part of a community of practitioners (Lave and Wenger 1991).

2.1.4 Early Years Professionals

In recent years a number of policies have focused on training the early years workforce. Osgood (2006:1) remarked that the early years workforce was

receiving unprecedented attention from policy makers, economists, mass media and commercial business investors... the voice of the early years community... is small, but the workforce is enormous and continuing to grow.

Similarly, Oberhuemer and Colberg-Schrader (1999:179) cited in Abbott and Hevey (2001) commented that:

practitioners in today's early childhood institutions are maybe facing some of the most demanding challenges in the history of their profession,

and Urban (2008:136) claimed that:

contradictory debates on the early years profession that have gained new prominence in many countries in recent years.

It is useful to note that in exploring the historical context of early years training it has been the case for many years, that school teachers have been qualified to a degree level, while staff working in playgroups and nurseries whether state funded, private, community or indeed those who worked as childminders, have not followed any long-standing tradition regarding the training of staff, suitable programs of study and the extent or otherwise of WBL (Mooney et al. 2001). And while the 1960s saw the emergence of the playgroup movement most playgroups were staffed by volunteers who did not have specialised work based training.

In order to gain a fuller picture of the changes occurring in early years provision, it is useful to consider its historical context. Traditionally, the early childhood education and care system has seen a divide between early childhood education, childcare services for unemployed parents and childcare delivered as part of welfare services. These services did not operate in a co-ordinated manner and were governed by different legislation and roles and responsibilities. Social workers were responsible for young children and families were supported by family support workers (Tunstill et al. 2007). Greater focus on the effects of social and emotional deprivation in children and the role of early years settings in supporting parents developed when the Department of Social Services took over early years services from the Department of Public Health.

1979 saw a battle within the newly formed Conservative government between those who wanted to develop the early years services and those who did not. Sir Keith Joseph (1975) continued his four-year campaign to press for better services for children through practitioners who engaged in WBL and additional qualifications to develop their practical and theoretical skills. Some of the measures he advocated included effective education in parenting skills and quality provision with appropriately qualified staff for pre-school children. The uncoordinated and fragmented nature of the early years services was highlighted in a review by Pugh (1988:88) who commented that there was:

a low national commitment to developing and resourcing preschool services, and the absence of a national policy on what services should be provided, for whom and by whom.

The *HERA project* (Hevey and Windle, 1990) examined the qualifications and training opportunities in the sector, and found that unclear progression routes, accompanied by a glut of qualifications each with a lack of market value, have led to confusion between clients and employers (Cordeaux, 1999). *The Rumbold Report* (DfES, 1990:20) again drew attention to the lack of co-ordinated services for children, low levels of funding, lack of training opportunities and lack of choice for parents and stressed the need for a curriculum which promoted early learning.

The Report described a disparate childcare workforce in which adults

have traditionally enjoyed less esteem than those working in older age ranges with differing markedly opportunities for in-service training

Abbott and Pugh (1998:149) have commented that the workforce appeared to have many workers with 'no formal qualifications ... often considerable practical experience' with skills and knowledge held tacitly whilst Hevey and Curtis concluded (1996:213) that:

this lack of concern over training and qualifications for what are in reality highly responsible roles is underpinned by something more fundamental than free market philosophy. Rather it reflects confused and outmoded public attitudes that commonly regard the care of young children as an extension of the mothering role and assume it all comes naturally to women. Such attitudes in turn reinforce the low status of early years work, helping to keep pay low and turnover high.

The Labour Government in 1997 appeared committed to developing a coherent range of early years services through working in partnership with other departments, addressing inequalities of access, reviewing training, qualifications and progression routes for early years practitioners. It was anticipated that increased training which included substantial WBL would be seen as instrumental in the improvements in early years services. However, Ball and Vincent (2005) have pointed out that these measures did not eliminate the stratification of childcare and early education. The most significant change during this period of the Labour Government was the transfer of responsibility of early years services from local authorities to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the development of the Early Years National Training Organisation (EYNTO). The creation of the EYNTO was a direct result of the changing economic conditions which led to a larger proportion of women going to

work; this in turn led to a need for increased childcare facilities. This economic change resulted in the Government being more open to ideas of workforce development and clear progression routes such as nationally accredited awards and the development of Level 4 S/NVQs (which are predominantly WBL assessed) although Rainbird (2000:188) has argued that:

whilst NVQs may be useful in boosting confidence of those who do not have qualifications ... it may be difficult to use this methodology to establish progression routes. This is because workers can only be assessed at the level they are currently performing.

The Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfES, 1998) emphasised the need for trained staff and this was reiterated in the HMT (2004:44) report which stated:

The single biggest factor that determines the quality of childcare is the workforce. The current childcare workforce includes many capable and dedicated people. However... qualification levels are generally low... if the system is to develop into one that is among the best quality in the world, a steep change is needed in the quality and stability of the workforce.

Many writers claim that early years training was inadequate, made more so by the absence of sufficient WBL as a means of matching theory to practice (Bertram and Pascale, 2000; Cameron, 1997; Cameron et al. 2000b, 2002; CWDC, 2006; Moss, 2000, 2004; OECD, 2006; Rolfe, 2005). These authors also have highlighted the lack of clear progression routes. Campbell-Barr (2009:82) in their research established that the cost of training was a significant consideration for many of the providers which led to some providers explaining they b

select the course that they thought the most worthy and then adopted a system where one member of staff would attend the training and then cascade the information to other staff.

Rainbird's (2000:189) view is that:

at the operational level, questions of cover, leave, the need to maintain levels of production or service delivery may make it difficult for employees to be allowed time away from work for training and in small businesses, where all employers are needed releasing employers might be equally difficult to achieve.

In an attempt to streamline early years qualifications new professional standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) have been introduced (DfES, 2004a) and a common core of skills, knowledge and competence has been developed as well as a complementary set of qualifications for all those who work with children, young people and families (DfES, 2003). Hutton (2005) has welcomed the introduction of these initiatives based on learner credits which can be gained in either formal or informal settings with content validated and developed by employers through Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). However, Owen (2006: 185) has remarked that:

the Framework 'in practice' has not led to decreasing the number of qualifications, nor to clear routes into other areas of work with children and, because training courses are not mapped, workers are still doing a lot of training which does not count as formal qualifications.

Similarly, Urban (2008:138) has pointed out that:

too often the language of 'quality' is employed to legitimise the proliferating maze of regulations in early childhood education and care and to undermine instead of support professional autonomy.

The Government's failure to use regulation as a lever to raise standards through training which incorporates WBL and qualifications has been commented on for early years policy, whilst policy and operational aspects have been decentralised extensively (Bertram and Pascale, 2000; Cameron, 1997, 2007; Cameron et al. 2002). Occupational models such as those followed in Denmark and New Zealand which are supported by a robust regulatory framework and public funding have led to unified structures for those working in the early years field. In Denmark, for example, there is a high level of support available to parents, and services for children aged 0-6 are considered to be an integral part of the social welfare system. Such services focus on collaborating with parents to support children in all aspects of their development. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible to local authorities (Cameron and Moss, 2007). It is expected that all staff working with children are highly qualified and have undergone training which incorporates substantial WBL. With the exception of family day care, all facilities have a manager and deputy-manager, both of whom must be qualified pedagogues (social educators).

In considering the preparation of early years professionals it is of some interest to note that there are differences in not only practices but in definitions of personnel and programs between countries. So, for example, in the UK, pedagogy largely refers to the science of education, emphasising teaching and learning (Mortimer, 1999) and according to Edwards (2003:3) helps teachers make

informed interpretations of learners, knowledge, and environments in order to manipulate environments which help learners make sense of the knowledge available to them.

In contrast, some of continental Europe believes (Hansen, 2004) that educating and caring for children should follow a different philosophy. The focus is on the holistic view of the child and learning; care and upbringing are viewed as being 'joined up' in order to maximise the child's potential and growth. In these contexts pedagogues are not necessarily teachers or social workers, although their theory and practice draws on philosophy, social science and psychology (Hansen, 2004). In early years provision the pedagogues are the lead personnel, they have been trained for three and a half years at Centres of Further Education and prior to this they would have worked as early years assistants: so pedagogues require some years of prior WBL.

2.1.5 Early Years: Current Context

The years from 2001 to 2005 witnessed important changes in the sector. Equality in provision was promoted through *Birth to Three Matters* (Sure Start Unit, 2002) although some critics remain sceptical regarding its implementation (Baldock, 2001; Baldock et al. 2006). The training of early years practitioners became an important feature of the Government's agenda (DfES, 2003; CWDC, 2006; DfES, 2004a). Professionalising the workforce through practical training supported by theoretical underpinning gained prominence through *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) which underpinned the *Children Act 2004* (DfES, 2004). Following the recommendations of the Laming Inquiry (2003) on upskilling the workforce and working collaboratively with other departments the *Ten Year Strategy for Childcare* (DfES, 2004) unveiled plans for increasing training, qualifications and skills in the workforce (Owens and Haynes, 2008). For the first time in England, it became possible to speak of a 'children's sector' which incorporated all services for children in its remit. These included services for early years care and education, family support, health, education and youth justice. A

new post of Minister for Children and Families was created and the various civil service teams involved with early years were brought together under the umbrella of the Sure Start Unit. There is now a greater emphasis on the role of parents and increased collaboration between health services and other professionals working in local authorities that would seem to support the importance and relevance of WBL.

Moss (2006) focussed on the financial implications of an integrated highly qualified workforce, and notes that staffing costs accounts for a large majority of the early childhood services in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development) countries. The question remains: who will pay for the additional costs? The Government have so far not committed to agreeing on pay structures for workers and have not acknowledged that the impact of this measure may result in some parents not being able to afford nursery costs. It appears that whilst acknowledging 'a better qualified workforce and more workers trained to professional level' (DfES, 2005:24-25) is crucial to the vision of the Government's vision of providing quality childcare, there is no obvious translation of policy into practice.

In attempting to raise the skills and qualifications of the early years workforce, increased access to HE was promoted along with employer engagement through the medium of Foundation degrees. These degrees were part of a push to professionalise the early years workforce where 'the foundation degree is seen as a key enabler of workplace learning' (Brennan et al. 2006:31). So the upgrading of early years workers was to take place through WBL.

2.2 Foundation degrees

Foundation degrees were launched in 2000 by David Blunkett, the Minister for Education at the time. The rationale for this new qualification was widening participation for social inclusion, increasing participation for economic competitiveness and bridging the skills gap at the intermediate level. The seeds of foundation degrees had been sown earlier with *The Choosing to Change Report* in 1994, which had recommended that there was a need for intermediate Higher Education qualifications which combined vocationally orientated courses with the potential to progress to Higher Education and employment. Sir Ron Dearing's report in 1997 also underlined

the importance of raising the profile of vocational qualifications and this view was supported in 1999 by the Second Report of the National Skills Task Force, *Delivering Skills for All*. Dearing advocated the continued expansion of Higher Education as a means of competing in a globalized economy and viewed a large part of the growth at sub-degree level coming through qualifications such as the Higher National Certificate (HNC) and the HND. Kennedy in *Learning Works* (1997) highlighted the role of Further Education in increasing learning participation especially at the intermediate skills level. The Government saw sub-degree provision as appealing to a wider spectrum of people (including those who might not have previously considered Higher Education), addressing the skills gap, involving Further Education and complementing other developments such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Modern Apprenticeships (MAs). It therefore announced the introduction of a new two-year qualification and the purpose of this new qualification was not only to redress the perceived skills deficit but to support the growth of various emerging sectors of the economy, to reach a wide range of people and to equip them with the generic skills that would last them throughout their working lives.

According to the Government employers were supposed to benefit from this qualification as Foundation degrees would provide learners with the skills necessary for the workplace. In comparison to other work-related higher learning programmes where undergraduates have periods of work experience, here the workplace is central to the delivery of the programme. The intention was that employers would help not only in developing relevant skills but also in updating the skills and knowledge of their employees (Foundation Degree Task Force, 2004).

The Learning and Skills Agency (LSDA) supported the development of Foundation degrees and welcomed the role of FECs in the delivery of the programme (LSDA, 2003). Similarly, the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) was optimistic regarding the Foundation degrees programme and proposed that the programme should concentrate on occupational requirements rather than academic subjects. In particular they argued for extensive periods of WBL rather than short periods of work experience (Greenwood et al. 2000). Thurgate and MacGregor (2008:34) were of the opinion that:

the strength of Foundation degrees and WBL, in that they are not prescribed from traditional learning disciplines, will have more potential to deliver the upgrade skills for the workforce and new role development as many of them draw from a range of new working practices

as did Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004:19) commenting:

the introduction of Foundation degrees attempts to break down the status divide between knowledge-based and vocational subjects.

In contrast, Hyland (2002:287) is sceptical about the success of Foundation degrees and has argued that 'changing terminology and tinkering with pathways will not bring about the necessary values transformation required to achieve the desired objectives'. Worryingly, findings from a report on Foundation degrees which examined employer and student perspectives (Longhurst, 2007:5) found that both employers and learners perceived the description of foundation degrees as 'vocational' in a negative context. They associated the term 'foundation' with 'less challenging and dumbed down qualifications'. Furthermore, the 2004 briefing to Ministers (Besley, 2004:5) voices similar concerns about 'raising the status of vocationally-oriented courses and the credibility of two year HE qualifications'.

In support of WBL, the Foundation degrees qualification benchmark (QAA, 2004: 72) stated that:

Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of foundation degrees and their design. It enables learners to take on appropriate role(s) within the workplace, giving them an opportunity to learn and apply skills and knowledge they have acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of higher-level learning within both the institution and the workplace.

However, Fuller (2001:246) has noted:

it is not clear that the creation of this new type of award will generate demand from some individuals who may be unenthusiastic about a work-based qualification, which connects closely with their current employment.

Indeed employer engagement continues to be problematic as many employers claim not to have been consulted on the programme details of the Foundation degrees

(Benyon et al. 2009; Coni, 2007; Green, 2006; Gibbs, 2002a; Hearsum, 2005; Milner and Walton, 2006; Taylor et al. 2006). This has led to misunderstandings regarding the nature of the course, the assessment details and the extent of employer involvement leading Thurgate et al. (2007:219) to comment that:

Foundation degrees for...employers remain high-risk ventures until the outcomes are evaluated as giving added value for service users.

Smith and Betts (2003:236) echoing similar concerns emphasise that 'if the Government fails to provide the incentives for employer involvement they will have failed to learn from experience of previous initiatives'.

Marketing of Foundation degrees appears not to have promoted the new qualification. Mowlam et al. (2003) and York Consulting (2004) have commented that employer engagement was affected by the lack of understanding regarding the name, award and the level of the qualification. Gibbs (2002:239) commented that the award was misleading as 'it trades on the values and benefits of a predecessor, the Honours Degree'. 'Foundation degrees have been advertised as a distinctive new qualification' (FdF, 2007) but critics (Gibbs, 2002; Morgan, et al. 2004) argue that other than its name, there is nothing distinctive about the qualification as it takes the same amount of time to complete as a HND. Although *The Future of Higher Education*, (DfES, 2003) recognises the difficulties which a new qualification might face, it stresses that 'we now need to embed Foundation degrees and ensure they are widely accepted and valued both by employers and learners' (DfES, 2003:43). Positioning this new product will require the customer and the stakeholders 'to be persuaded that the brand is right for them' (Groucutt, 2006:104). Longhurst (2007:12) notes that:

the brand name has not yet gained a foothold in the HE market it would appear with time that market will be receptive and with experience HEIs and FEIs will adjust their practices and improve both the content and the pedagogy of the qualification.

Knight et al. (2006) have suggested that employers have not formally recognised the award and it remains unclear why the Government decided to go ahead with the title 'Foundation Degree' after the title 'Associate Degree' had been rejected. It was decided not to pursue the 'Associate Degree' title as there was minimal support for the

introduction of such a qualification. It was seen as diminishing and devaluing the term 'degree' and therefore likely to become a second class qualification which would not be credible with employers or recognised overseas (NCIHE 1997:147). The title 'Foundation Degree' appears not to have clarified the level of the qualification and has been unsuccessful in establishing its credentials whilst creating confusion in a market bursting with qualifications. HEIST (Higher Education Information Services Trust) Rhodes and Ellis, (2008) conducted a survey of employers on their awareness of Foundation degrees. Unsurprisingly, the survey found that although 76% of employers were aware of Foundation degrees they had no further understanding or knowledge of the qualification. 35 % believed that they were an entry level course, 11% believed that the WBL was accredited by a university, 39% were unaware of employer engagement and 32% had no notion that they were introduced to address the skills gap. Following this survey, FdF (Foundation degree Forward), Lockley, (2006) commissioned HEIST to recommend the various ways this qualification could be better marketed and suggestions include different ways of carrying out market research, evaluating the marketing strategy and choosing the most effective messages for learners and employers.

Foundation degrees were intended to promote widening participation for learners through their flexible design as well as delivery and entry requirements. Learners on Foundation degrees do not need to hold any formal qualifications to gain entry as long as they have substantial experience of working in their field. Thus Foundation degrees are able to cater for those learners who might previously have been hindered from entering HE. The delivery of the programme takes different routes: for example twilight classes, distance learning, full-time, part-time and web-based learning. In addition, Foundation degrees provide self-standing qualifications that have a market value and clear routes for progression to HE, including bachelor's degrees, professional qualifications and higher NVQs (DfES, 2001). Since most Foundation degree programmes are run in FECs, non-traditional learners can be attracted as they will view the FEC as their 'local college' rather than being daunted by a HE Institution. FECs can market their courses to reach excluded learners in their local community and provide opportunities for these learners to get out of the cycle of disadvantage and make qualitative improvements in their life. To help learners succeed and complete the course, learners on the Foundation degrees have access to mentors

who can help them in a variety of ways, thus enabling 'widening participation' and including many more learners (DfES, 2001; DfES, 2002c). Smith and Betts (2003) remain uncertain that Foundation degrees in FECs will be a successful venture as they displace the autonomous educational portfolio that FECs have maintained which has helped them to retain their distinctive character in the educational marketplace.

Stuart-Hoyle (2007:89) following an unsuccessful effort to establish a Foundation degree in Tourism questions the widening participation agenda and states that:

Widening participation is all about encouraging those individuals who would not ordinarily consider HE the opportunity to do so. It is not about raising their hopes and subsequently dashing them because government does not provide the finances required to turn employer support in principle into a reality.

The claim of the Government is that Foundation degrees can benefit the economy because they provide learners with further opportunities to study, thus encouraging lifelong learning. If employees are keen to update their skills constantly this will contribute to a motivated workforce which possesses the skills to compete in a globalized economy. This continuous CPD will help in narrowing the skills gap between occupations requiring higher qualifications and an under-qualified workforce (Blunkett 2000; DfES, 2000, 2002). Brain et al. (2004) and Little (2005) felt that Foundation degrees would not address the skills gap or indeed benefit those who have historically been unable to access. Opposing this view, Caller (2005:18) found that Foundation degrees with their emphasis on WBL and gaining graduate qualifications appear to appeal 'primarily to the non-traditional student and could potentially attract those who have not previously considered entering higher education'. Edmond et al. (2007) have argued that Foundation degrees will play a key role in remodelling the early years workforce where many roles were previously perceived as low skilled and requiring low levels of qualification. They further state that the education sector (which includes early years) Foundation degrees have the largest number of learners enrolled compared to other Foundation degree courses. In addition, they note that as the education sector has a large proportion of the workforce who are mature women, Foundation degrees as part time qualifications with their WBL element, are critical in raising skills levels in the workforce. It is apparent that Foundation degrees face challenges of acceptance from employers and learners and

it will be interesting to observe the government's 'input' in the ironing out some of the difficulties.

2.3 Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree (EYSEFD)

The EYSEFD was developed because of a need in the early years sector to employ staff with higher levels of skills and qualifications, to provide a clear pathway for progression and to offer learning opportunities which would enable employees to combine work and studying. The EYSEFD was developed by the qualifications team located at the Early Years Unit at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and included representatives drawn from Local Education Authorities (LEAs), HE, and early years providers.

In recognising the need for a new career qualification which had WBL as central to its delivery, the DfES (2002:1) announced the introduction of the EYSEFD especially for early years practitioners which would help create 'a new level of professional practice in the Early Years'. The Statement of Requirement (DfES, 2001) indicated 'exactly what is required by the employer', and is used as a framework for the Foundation degree. It was anticipated that the EYSEFD (DfES, 2002:1) would 'help raise standards and give individuals the recognition they deserve,' and enable experienced practitioners with few qualifications to access HE and raise their skill levels. The EYSEFD provided a much needed opportunity for professional development for early years practitioners. Prior to the introduction of this award there were limited opportunities for practitioners to access CPD and long-term HE vocational qualifications (DfES, 2003).

This chapter has examined the importance of WBL in the training of a range of professions. It has outlined the long history of WBL in teacher preparation. In all these cases WBL is intended as an opportunity for future practitioners to integrate theory and practice in the workplace. The final sections of this chapter have emphasised the need for early years workers to gain recognisable qualifications, and the government's initiative in this area based around Foundation degrees.

The issues raised in this chapter help place in context some of the research questions considered in this study, specifically associated with assessment in WBL from the perspectives of:

- learners in an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree
- employers whose employees are enrolled in an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree

This chapter has set the scene for an exploration of the challenges of WBL for those on the EYSEFD. The following chapter discusses WBL both in relation to the Foundation degree and in relation to key aspects which underpin WBL.

CHAPTER 3

Work-based Learning and the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree

This chapter explores what has been identified as the benefits and challenges of vocational study and WBL in Foundation degrees with some examples from research undertaken in the EYSEFD. The focus is placed on the stakeholders who are involved with the WBL element such as employers, learners, colleges and universities. The benefits of pastoral care and inclusion of study skills have been highlighted as aspects of curriculum delivery which enhance WBL and help in developing skills for participating in HE and the challenges faced by tutors in implementing and adopting workable systems together with responding to the needs of diverse learners.

3.1 WBL and employers

According to the Government, Foundation degrees are intended to support employers and

the Foundation degree integrates academic and work-based learning through close collaboration between employers and programme providers (QAA 2002:2).

Foundation degrees are intended to provide learners with the skills necessary for the workplace and, as such, employer involvement is a distinctive element of this qualification. Employers are expected to be involved in the funding, design, assessment and some aspects of delivery of the qualification (DfES, 2000, 2001). Employers help in not only developing relevant skills but also in updating the skills and knowledge (both theoretical and practical), of their employees (Foundation degree Task Force, DfES, 2004).

Successive Government policies have tried to develop links with employers in an attempt to create a culture which is driven by the employment market rather than a supply-led education provision (Brenan and Gosling, 2004; Davis, 2005; DfES, 2003, 2005; Raddon and Quinn, 2007). Foundation degrees are expected to develop skill

levels of members of the workforce, to increase productivity and to help the UK compete in the globalized economy. A study commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to inform their strategy on workplace learning found that:

A high level of engagement is characterised by situations where the employer and the higher education provider have an equal shared interest in ensuring high standards of education and training to support the initial formation of specialists to work in that employment sector, the continuing development of those specialists, and the continuing development of other employees (Brennan et al. 2006:50).

Perry (2008:25), commenting on the Assistant Practitioner Foundation degree which brings together staff from education, health and social care has commented that:

Foundation degrees support both the student and the employer, providing an opportunity to learn whilst working and earning, making this an accessible route to professional development.

Jones (2008) remarking on the Foundation degree at Warwick University highlighted the positive relationships with employers which contributed to the success of the Foundation degree, although research by Snape et al. (2006) on the EYSEFD suggested that for some learners, lack of employer support contributed to their non-completion of the course. Little (2005) remains sceptical about Foundation degrees. She notes that employers generally supported those employees who were taking specialised qualifications and Fuller (2001) observed that Foundation degrees would in effect subsidize employers who would have supported workforce development regardless whilst Gibbs (2002a) maintains that Foundation degrees view the learner as:

a unit of utility... the main beneficiaries will be employers in the form of surplus-value generated for them by newly qualified learners.

Projects such as Effective Early Learning (EEL) illustrated that successful settings had leaders who supported on-going training of their staff (Blatchford and Manni, 2006) and Wenger (1998) underlines the role of managers in creating an organizational ethos where there is constant sharing and creating of knowledge. One of the ways

managers can facilitate this culture is allocating time to their employees to participate in activities and training programmes which will ultimately benefit the organization. The QAA (Quality Assurance Authority) in their review of EYSEFD at Carshalton College in 2002 pointed out that strong links with the employers had resulted in greater support of employees on the programme resulting in a positive impact on the workplace. Conversely, research by Taylor et al. (2006) on the EYSEFD has emphasised that lack of information and communication from colleges resulted in employers not being able to provide support to their employees. Creating a workforce which is motivated and trained will enable the organization to survive in a competitive environment and could result in the expansion of the organization as well as benefitting employees.

However, there have been criticisms of this model in relation to contemporary organisations with complex structures (Rainbird, 2000b), and the failure to take into account factors such as power play and relationships and their influence on individuals' learning and opportunities (Cohen, 1999; Contu and Wilmott, 2000; Driver, 2002; Fox, 2000 and Reynolds 2000). Taylor et al. (2006) point out that lack of positive relationships between the employee and the employer and inadequate information regarding the EYSEFD led to insufficient support being provided.

Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging the positive benefits of workplace learning, Rainbird (2000a:1) warns that it can also be problematic because the primary objective of the workplace is not learning, but the production of goods and services. It can be argued that productivity of an organization is dependent on the knowledge and skills the workers have and productivity is related to skills and knowledge acquisition. There is also the possibility of workers' learning being limited in a highly productive workplace where the tasks and levels of skills required are mechanistic and repetitive such as data input work. Almost three decades ago research conducted by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (Lowden, 1989:2) found that there were a number of factors which governed training decisions made by employers. These included financial considerations, productivity, personnel and time management concerns, availability and quality of external training and training resources. A more recent survey by King (2007:1-2)) which examined workforce development and employer engagement arrived at similar conclusions:

Businesses do not generally relate the learning they offer staff to academically recognised levels; they are less interested in the whole qualification than in what could improve their economic performance, enable employees to meet legislative (e.g. health and safety) requirements, fit them for an enhanced role or tackle new processes, individuals, however, may have a need to keep up their professional qualifications or be interested in portable awards.

The Government's *White Paper on Skills* (DfES, 2003) emphasises the involvement of employers through Foundation degrees, yet Keep, (2003:3) argues that although:

it is easy to launch government sponsored interventions in the training market in the shape of subsidised training of one form or another, using this lever to promote lasting change is extremely problematic. The crucial yet persistently absent ingredient is how to persuade the vast majority of employers to get engaged in the process.

Research conducted by Bridge et al. (1998) and Ram (2000) indicated that any form of systematic learning is difficult in small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) because of the workload pressures of staff and occasionally fears around poaching (Cully, 2005; Coopers and Lybrand Associates, 1985; Green, 1996; Hyman, 1992; LSC, 2004; Lyall, 2005). Foundation degrees in Playwork have reported that it is difficult to enrol learners from small private and voluntary sector as they do not have sufficient funds to train staff or replace staff on training (Godfrey, 2008). In SMEs time and monetary constraints render learning almost impossible (Lange et al. 2000). A great deal of the learning that takes place is unplanned and unstructured and in the learners' own time. Boud (in Boud and Solomn, 2001) discusses the shift of roles from learner to worker that has to be accommodated in WBL and the tensions of identity that are created. Usually there are no clear distinctions and the perception of learners in the workplace is often only as an employee and not as learners, leading Boud (2001:36) to question:

Is the work based learner really a bona fide student at all or some type of hybrid student cum worker?

In the case of Foundation degrees QAA (2004) research noted that:

Causes of this level of variability in work-based learning are partly due to employers' lack of understanding of the nature and requirements of Foundation degrees.

Research (Gleeson and Keep 2004) note that half of the employers reported that they require more information to comprehend fully Foundation degree requirements and the potential for their own role. Some providers produce guidance on work-based learning for learners, but less frequently for employers. In five cases, the reviewers report only a limited level of employer involvement in the programmes. Taylor et al. (2006), commenting on employers' perceptions of the EYSEFD have concluded that in many cases employers remained unaware of their role and the precise requirements of Foundation degrees. It is evident that there are wide variations in the perceptions of employers and Gleeson and Keep (2004: 47-48) question whether employers should be given the responsibility of identifying the purpose and nature of Vocational Education and Training (VET). They comment that: 'this privilege is a voice without responsibility' and identify that in the current debate there is absence of

explicit debate about, and clarity upon, the respective rights, responsibilities and roles (the three 'Rs') of the different actors in the VET system.

3.2 WBL and Learners

The Foundation degree Benchmark (QAA, 2004, para, 23) claimed the following benefits of WBL:

It enables learners to take on appropriate roles within the workplace, giving them the opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of high-level training within the institution and the workplace. It should be a two way process, where learning in one environment is applied in the other. Work-based learning requires the identification and achievement of defined and related learning outcomes.

Foundation degrees provide an opportunity for those working in the early years sector to undertake higher level vocational qualifications. Prior to the introduction of Foundation degrees there were insufficient opportunities for the workforce to access HE vocational qualifications; this programme enables access for those who want to gain qualifications as well as for those who might have missed out on educational and training opportunities. In this way, Foundation degrees can be viewed as stepping stones to other career opportunities.

Various studies on the EYSEFD (O'Keefe and Tait, 2004; Snape and Finch, 2006; Mowlam et al. 2003) have commented on the benefits of WBL by learners. The learners indicated that WBL had enabled them to match theory with practice, increase self confidence and a sense of achievement. Similar sentiments were echoed by learners on the EYSEFD in Carshalton College (QAA, 2006:2) who reported that:

the theoretical content of the programme enabled them to take a critical and informed view of their practice.

Similarly, Burke's (2009:28) research on an Early Years Foundation degree in which all learners were employed and 'work-based learning also integrated into assignments' found that:

A small number of learners and course directors commented on who was involved in assessment (the university, college, employers). Where employers were involved in the assessment of learners, this was seen as positive by all those who commented on employer involvement. However, some course directors identified that employers were not currently involved in student assessment. Other course directors reported that employers played an important role in assessment on the Foundation degree.

The idea of education as a vehicle for helping individuals and institutions move forward, and the idea that learning by doing is a particularly effective method of learning, are hardly new ideas. John Dewey's theory (1916, 1938, and 1948/1920) that education propels and encourages individuals to achieve their potential through learning by doing is one of the suppositions in the Foundation degree programme (Beany, 2005, 2006; Cheri/LSN, 2008; Doyle and O'Doherty, 2006; QAA, 2002). Dewey maintained that this manner of learning would enable individuals to develop skills and habits that would aid problem solving skills, develop motivation, encourage critical thinking and as a result, lead towards the development of a tolerant society. Research by Snape and Finch (2006) indicated that the early years practitioners developed a better understanding of their workplace through such an approach: although applying this new found knowledge was not always met with approval in their workplace. In *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey introduced the importance of vocational education and stated that new ideas emanate from being actively involved at work. Individuals actively participate in the learning and develop both intellectual and rational processes which in turn help to develop reasoning and judgement skills.

These skills enable individuals to work together in a democratic manner in making judgements and decisions which favour the interests of the groups with whom they are working. Many authors claim that WBL encourages reflection and the development of problem solving skills and propels the learners to acquire meta-competence that is, learning how to learn (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Biggs, 1996, 1999; Marton et al. 1997; Marton and Saljo, 1976; Prosser and Trigwell, 1998).

Dewey (1916) and Biggs (2003), in particular, outlined the benefits of WBL as it distinguished between declarative and functional or procedural knowledge. The former refers to knowledge which the learners can record whilst the latter refers to knowledge which learners have to perform in their workplace to demonstrate their understanding. Therefore, it is important that any learning activities involve applying what has been stated or read and that any assessment structures provide learners with a chance to demonstrate both their declarative and functional/procedural knowledge. Dewey (1916) stresses the benefits of learning by experience as this process involves the learner being engaged in learning through experimenting with new ideas and ways of working. Similarly, Sangster and Marshall (2000:52) remark that in WBL,

practice and theory merge and support each other... this allows new insights to emerge from the ongoing learning cycle of – experience – reflection - theory ensuring that the development of any new theory will be truly grounded.

This idea is supported by Cole (1990:23 cited in Herrington and Oliver, 2000) who has suggested that:

abstract knowledge... is not retrievable in real life, problem solving contexts, because this approach ignores the interdependence of situation and cognition. When learning and context are separated, knowledge itself is seen as the final product... rather than a tool to be used dynamically to solve problems.

Commenting on the research undertaken on the EYSEFD, Snape and Finch (2006), have noted that the Foundation degrees through the emphasis on WBL gave the learners a deeper understanding of their work. Similarly Hallet's (2010:57) research on the Early Years Foundation Degree (EYFD) concluded that:

The opportunity for learners to question and reflect upon their work practices through dialogue with other student practitioners...tutors enabled them to review and modify their professional practice.

Eraut (1994) highlights the differences in types of knowledge, proposing that knowledge which is acquired by the learners in universities is propositional, factual knowledge based primarily upon information that can be easily documented. Conversely, knowledge acquired in practice is typically tacit process based knowledge, which takes into account previous acquired knowledge and experience and is often concerned with knowing how to complete a particular task as there is an emphasis on working in teams, problem solving and working with the resources available. Furthermore, Eraut (ibid) remarks that although some elements of the university education will be process based, these will not relate directly to the processes followed in the workplace. This is because organizations differ in ethos, size, leadership styles, budgetary constraints and expertise of professionals. Knowledge, and the appropriate use of knowledge, comes from being part of the teaching community as 'it makes no sense to talk of knowledge that is decontextualised, abstract or general' (Tennant, 1977:77). Learning is likely to be effective and meaningful when based upon real experiences and may promote a sense of self worth and achievement (Argyris 1982; Brookfield, 1988; MacIntosh, 1993). For some learners this mechanism for learning will require them to move outside of their 'comfort zone' and be prepared to take risks and fail.

Peer group support which enabled learners to talk and discuss aspects of their work enhanced the WBL component of the course (Jones, 2008; Snape and Finch, 2006; OKeefe and Tait, 2004). Learners on the EYSEFD at Carshalton College (QAA, 2006:5) have commented on the benefits of class discussion in evaluating their practice which has helped to develop an ethos of reflection and consistent self assessment of their practice. Shaw (2002:30), expanding on the themes of conversations in WBL, writes:

In the movement of our everyday communicative activity, we are creating who we are and what we can do together within shifting constraints of a material, technological and social nature. This is not the way we usually describe what we are doing in organizations.

Similarly, McDermott (in Murphy 1999:17) states:

Learning traditionally gets measured as if on the assumption that it is a possession of individuals that can be found inside their heads... [Here] learning is in the relationships between people. Learning is in the conditions that bring people together and organize a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on relevance; without the points of contact, without the system of relevancies, there is not learning, and there is little memory. Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are a part.

As WBL is centred on everyday 'live' projects this challenges individuals' existing knowledge and skills and so leads to the creation of new knowledge. Also, different approaches promote discussion, sharing of problems and the identification of imaginative and sometimes innovative solutions (Hutchison and Bosacki, 2001; King 1997; Molander, 1992; Raelin, 2000; van Merriënboer et al. 2003). Meyer and Land (2003, 2005) introduced the idea that in certain disciplines there are 'conceptual gateways' or 'portals' that lead the learner to previously inaccessible, and perhaps initially 'troublesome', ways of thinking about something. This new manner of thinking could result in new understanding or interpretations of a subject. This can have the effect of fundamentally changing the outlook of the learner in that,

These can be transformative (occasioning a significant shift in the perception of a subject), irreversible (unlikely to be forgotten, or unlearned only through considerable effort), integrative (exposing the previously hidden interrelatedness of something) and troublesome, through a variety of reasons (Meyer and Land 2005:1).

Lave and Wenger (1991) focus on how communities of practice are formed by those who share a common interest and because of their interaction find opportunities of improving their practice. Newcomers to this community learn as they watch others and over time become absorbed. However, Lave and Wenger (ibid) fail to address power relations within this community and whether participation can be affected by hidden agendas or power play within members of the group. For example, an early years practitioner might find that there are practices in the workplace which are not in the best interests of the children but because of possible power imbalance may feel unable to challenge these practices. Thus, one of the key criticisms of Lave and

Wenger's theory (1991) that it does not give the novice learner 'a voice' and assumes that the novice is lacking in perception and reasoning leading Tennant (1997:79) to state that:

In their eagerness to debunk testing, formal education and formal accreditation, they do not analyse how their omission [of a range of questions and issues] affects power relations, access, public knowledge and public accountability.

3.3 WBL and Reflective Practice

The QAA recognises the importance of self reflection and expects institutions to design Foundation degrees which:

provide sufficient time for self directed learning and reflection to encourage lifelong learning by supporting learners to develop action plans, demonstrate active learning and facilitate the learners' ownership of the learning process (QAA, 2002:9).

WBL allows the learners to reflect on issues and Barnett (1990:76) views reflection as:

the ability to bring past events to a conscious level, to make sense of them, and to determine appropriate ways to act in future.

The process of 'making meaning' helps the learners to develop an understanding of themselves and their environment (Billett; 2001; Rogers, 2006; Schon, 1983; Tierney and Slack, 2005). Dewey (1933) saw the human mind as a meaning-making organ, trying to make sense and meaning of the world. His model of the five phases of reflection (suggestion, intellectualization, development of hypothesis, elaboration of hypothesis and testing the hypothesis) fits well with changes that early years practitioners consistently need to accommodate. The sequence of these stages is not fixed and not all stages need to occur. Jones (2008:15) has highlighted the benefits of reflective practice as a result of WBL amongst learners on the EYSEFD. Learners commented that they had gained and developed in confidence and one learner commented that:

I learned to be more reflective in my practice. The knowledge I have gained about theories of learning has helped me understand why I do the things I do now, rather than just accept that that is the way it is done.

Garrick and Usher (1999) and Edwards and Usher (2000) suggest that WBL can lead to importance being placed on alternate types of knowledge identified as mode 2 knowledge. The characteristics of Mode 1 knowledge first conceptualised by Gibbons et al (1992) are identified as:

tradition-bound in practice as well as conventional in form ...produced on a campus by academic researchers in clearly demarcated scholarly disciplines (Luke. 1996:7).

Mode 2 knowledge, by contrast, is:

an emergent gridwork of intellectual products increasingly produced and consumed outside of traditional university settings (Luke,1996:7).

Dewey's theory (1916) that the interplay of the two principles of continuity and interaction results in experience, is pertinent to the context of Foundation degrees as the curriculum content and the delivery concentrates on building upon the experiences to facilitate acquisition of knowledge and skills which will impact favourably on the organization. Dewey (ibid) postulated that the emphasis on the learning experience through the delivery of well taught lessons would result in a liberating educational experience and enable them to be positive role models in society. However, Dewey (ibid) does not focus on the constraints of the workplace. Jarvis (1999) points out that the learner has to work or learn within the cultural and social norms of the organization and any learning that takes place will be influenced by these factors (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2003). Therefore, not all learning can be termed as being positive as the learner is constrained by the culture of the organization, which could have negative aspects, and the learner has to work within these restraints.

Tutors in the classroom can support the learners in matching theory to practice, enabling their learners to reflect on their WBL and in this manner participate

in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities (Lave and Wenger, 2002:115).

In this manner the learning becomes 'an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in-world' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:35). Through their experience of WBL learners can become part of a community and begin to make personal reflections, understand the workplace ethos and their role within it develop relationships and arrive at an understanding of the workings in an early years setting. For example, consider the decisions taken in an early years setting with regards to employing a specialist to work with a child who has Special Educational Needs (SEN). Are the decisions taken in the best interests of the child or were budgetary constraints driving the decision? How does their own upbringing impact on the children they look after or how has their upbringing affected their educational or life choices? Learners can talk about their experiences and knowledge becomes embedded through conversations. In this manner, 'knowledge is not an 'it' but 'a process of action' (Stacey, 2001:116). However,

The truth or insight may be a pleasant awakening or rob one of an illusion; the understanding itself is morally neutral. The quicksilver flash of insight may make one rich or poor in an instant (Palmer, 2001:4).

3.4 WBL: the challenge to Universities

In July 2007, the Government published its response to the Leitch Review (DfES, 2007) which had outlined its plans to make the UK a world class skills leader by 2010.

The response stated:

We will continue to encourage more HEIs to collaborate with employers to develop programme and delivery methods that meet the need for higher level skills needs (DIUS, 2007: 12).

This statement was not new. As early as 1977 it had been noted that:

Amongst the diverse aims of higher education is the need to develop learners for the world of work. Yet the workplace is changing rapidly and with it the development needs of learners.....The university experience must provide both academic rigour and the skills to apply that rigour to every aspect of life and

work. In many institutions this requires a fundamental cultural shift; something that cannot be imposed and that will not take place overnight (DfEE, 1997a).

Similarly, Haynes (2008:109) agrees arguing that:

The privilege of assessment of theoretical knowledge in professional education, and the dominant role of university teachers, is incongruent with the situated learning perspective. The institutional boundaries between education and work represent a threat to learning to become a professional.

The legitimization of WBL has posed many challenges to the universities. Historically, knowledge and knowledge production was deemed to belong to academia (Ebbutt, 1996; Connor, 2005; Costley et al. 1999; Toulmin, 1990) however, in recent years knowledge has been connected to productivity and has acquired a currency of its own, shifting the emphasis of knowledge from academia to the workplace (Burke et al. 2009; Dewhurst, 2006; Edmond et al. 2007; Foundation Direct, 2008; Gee et al. 1996; Greenbank, 2007; McIntyre and Solomon, 2000; Reeve et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2005). Symes and McIntyre (2000) state that WBL poses a fundamental threat to education and needs to be viewed as a harbinger of fundamental change and not an aberration which will disappear; they argue that the distinctions between education and training will get blurred as WBL gains legitimacy. Boud and Symes (2000:15) refer to WBL as, 'an idea whose time has come.' They comment that WBL is demand driven by a number of stakeholders. Learners, for example, require recognition of what they have learnt choices between flexible modes of delivery and the opportunity to concentrate upon their work as the major focus of their study. This encompasses the rationale for Foundation degrees as a qualification which will allow learners to develop their skills using their workplace as the focus of this development. Employers want their employees to study on courses which relate directly to the workplace so that they can use this learning to increase productivity and skill levels, while Governments want HE to work collaboratively with employers and shift costs from the public purse. Finally, Universities do not want to be too dependent on funding from the government and want to engage in partnerships with employers.

Tollyfield (2006:13) remarks that:

HEIs that rigidly adhere to a traditional model of academic excellence may not be best placed to respond to employers and employees as customers.....adaptive institutions can, not only to the benefit of their customers, but also to their financial and academic benefit.

Foundation degrees as work-based qualifications are expected to address the skills shortages and meet the Governments target of expansion of learners in HE. Brennan (2005:5) maintains that:

If higher education is to continue to have relevance, it must address the economic imperatives for the supply of workers with appropriate skills and knowledge to equip them for the changing nature of work.

Nevertheless, critics (Gleeson and Keep, 2004; Hillier and Rawnsley, 2006; Keep, 2003) have argued that engaging with employers remains an issue, and there is a need to re-think and restructure the HE curriculum, teaching and learning methods and modes of delivery. The challenge for some universities will be to adjust to their new identities as partners and accommodate the notion that they are no longer sole 'holders' of knowledge. Learning at the workplace enables matching theory to practice and WBL contributes to both the organization's and the employee's productivity (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997; Garrick and Usher, 1999; Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Costley et al. (1999: 59) note:

educationalists need to rethink their premises and traditional constructions about learning and knowledge.... if higher education is to play a role in recognising curricula emanating outside the university and reconciling it with the expertise that is unique to higher education.

The benefits and tensions surrounding WBL are evident and it remains to be seen how Foundation degrees might find a way to address these issues.

3.5 The Role of Assessment in WBL

QAA (2004) has argued that the assessment on Foundation degrees should be academically credible and needs to fit in with the workplace demands of the learners. However, Besley (2004:8) has remarked that:

assessment of work based learning emerges as a real concern and although the Report (QAA, 2004) briefing to Ministers talks smoothly of 'innovative approaches' it is not clear what these are or how to apply them.

Edmond et al. (2007:176-177) reporting on their research of five Foundation degrees offered by the School of Education at Brighton note:

the use of the workplace as a site of assessment is managed differently across different Foundation degrees, depending on a number of factors, including what might be termed the workplace culture in relation to assessment of performance, the resource implications of assessment through observation by workplace staff, and the availability of staff appropriately qualified to undertake such assessments ... Where they do not exist or do not exist uniformly across a sector (such as in the Early Years Sector), then the cost of enabling such assessment, within the budget of the Foundation degrees can become prohibitive.

Assessment is not an exact science however, and through diversification it may be possible to assess and evidence the learning of the subject matter more reliably (Barrow, 2004; Biggs, 2003; Crook et al. 2006; Gibbs, 1999; Lakos, 2005; Pellegrino et al. 2003). This can lead to measuring 'know how' and 'know why' more than 'know what'.

In supporting Edmond et al., Thurgate and MacGregor (2008) claimed that

assessment of work-based learning is a dual responsibility and is expensive in human resources. It is this feature of Foundation degrees that is not recognised in central funding

and Hager (2004:250) continues

The emerging paradigm of learning, with its focus on holism, judgement, action and context, better represents the kinds of learning that occur in workplaces. At best, the type of learning valorized by the standard paradigm is but a small part of learning in workplaces. Thus, when it comes to assessing learning at work,

retaining the assessment assumptions of the standard paradigm will only serve to guarantee ineffective assessment.

WBL assessment on Foundation degrees needs not only to be appropriate to that workplace, but also consider that organizations will vary in their staff numbers, size and services they offer: so there needs to be both variety and flexibility in assessment practices in work based learning assignments (Allen and Williams, 2005; Connor, 2005; Foskett, 2005; Gibbs and Simpson, 2002; Major, 2002; Race, 2007). Moreover, employing a varied range of assessments would facilitate the embedding of WBL tasks (Biggs, 2003; Jordan and Putz, 2005; Sheehan, 2007). Assessment techniques have altered over time, so whereas once there were pen and paper examinations, there are now a variety of assessments including presentations, projects, observations, case studies and role plays.(Anning and Edwards, 2003; Bertram and Pascale, 2002, 2004; Black et al. 2003; Boud and Symes, 2000; Carr, 2002; Claxton, 1995; Hutchin, 2005, 2007; Jones, Knight, 2006; Morgan, 2004). Boud (1998, in, Brown and Glasner 1999) discussing the role of assessment in learning states that:

assessment methods and requirements probably have a greater influence on how and what learners learn than any other single factor.

One example of good practice was demonstrated by Taylor et al. (2003) who discussed issues of WBL assessments with learners on a Foundation degree in Educational Studies. She states that in assessing the assessments the following questions were asked:

Validity: does the assessment measure what it was intended to measure (module objectives and ongoing student reflection)?

Reliability: Does the assessment criteria remain stable with different assessors and learner cohorts?

Authenticity: What are the mechanisms in place to ensure that it is the learner's work?

Contextual authenticity: Does the assessment relate to 'real life'?

Practicality: Is the assessment manageable for the learner, tutor and the workplace?

These questions are pertinent as they focus on the importance of meeting all the above criteria in order to ensure the level and transparency of the assessment outcomes. Hallett (2010) commented that WBL assessments on the EYSEFD programme at Derby were accessible to learners, particularly those who had no previous experience of HE, as the content was familiar and the theoretical content could be related to their workplace. Taylor et al. (2006) have suggested that employers who were unsure of the quality of EYSEFD based their perceptions on a view that WBL was poorly assessed.

Most modules on this EYSEFD required observations on children followed by an analysis of the observations. WBL assessments can pose a range of difficulties and Edmond et al. (2007:176) commenting on WBL assessments, have highlighted that:

the capacity of employers to be involved in assessment is constrained by existing work place regimes. Where work-place staff have both training and the time to undertake assessment as part of their management role (in youth work and associated contexts for example), such assessment can be incorporated. Where they do not exist or do not exist uniformly across a sector (such as in the Early Years Sector), then the cost of enabling such assessment....can become prohibitive.

Research on WBL assessments on the EYSEFD by Taylor et al. (2006), Knight et al. (2006) and Snape et al. (2006) highlighted the fact that employers who engaged with the Foundation degree were more likely to help or enable their staff to complete assessments. This view was reiterated by Edmond et al. (2007:176) who stated:

Some learners will be supported and have safeguards around their time to undertake work-based learning activities while others will routinely find that they are called to undertake other work activities instead of the designated work-based learning tasks.

On-going concerns remain around the appropriateness and suitability of WBL assessments on Foundation degrees programme (Green 2006; Stinton 2007; Taylor et al. 2006).

3.6 WBL and student support

Foundation degrees are designed to attract the 'non traditional' learner through flexible entry qualifications and the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APEL) (City and Guilds, 2003; Gershon, 2003). Caller (2005:18) reiterates this point stating:

Foundation degrees appeal primarily to the 'non-traditional' student and could potentially attract those who have not previously considered entering higher education.

In order to meet the needs of learners who have previously not participated in 'formal education', effective support mechanisms need to be in place to alleviate tensions and problems not anticipated by the learners. These should include at least pastoral care and study skills (Allen, 2001; Gershon, 2003). In the case of EYSEFDs, pastoral support can facilitate WBL through providing mechanisms for dealing with other issues not related to academic study. Pastoral support enables learners to discuss issues which might be impacting on their work and develop strategies for overcoming them. Study Skills help develop the academic requirements for studying in HE.

3.6.1 Pastoral Support

Pastoral support refers to help, advice and information which are not related to the academic course which help learners engage in learning, both in a practical and an academic manner: One example is tutorials where learners meet with their tutor individually or in small groups to discuss issues which may be impacting on their course and attempt to find resolutions. Tutorials are an important component of this EYSEFD programme and the Government's White Paper (DfES, 2003. para 145) focuses on:

the need to meet the developing needs of learners for new modes of study and delivery of courses as well as pastoral and learning support.

Thomas (2002:431) wrote of the benefits of 'inclusive and accepting of difference, celebrating and prizing diversity, then this will in turn promote retention'. Martinez and Munday (1998) have pointed out the importance of effective tutorials in aiding student retention. However, other factors such as poor guidance and initial support (which could lead to inappropriate choice of course) together with external pressures, also

result in poor retention figures (Barwuah, and Andrews 1997). Green (2001) states that, 'the role of the tutor is central to successful learning,' and uses the example of North Warwickshire and Hinckley College to demonstrate that good practice needs to flow from the top downwards. Planning and training and the necessary financial input are essential ingredients for successful tutoring (Chapple and Tolley, 2000; Hoyle, 1982; Wootton, 2006).

Pastoral care can identify problems which may be hindering academic study, attempt to find solutions and in some cases retain the learners with successful outcomes (Barefoot, 2004; Christie et al. 2004; Green 2001; Yorke, 2004). Wheeler et al. (2004:2) undertook a study involving tutors and learners on an Education Foundation degree for classroom assistants and concluded that:

mature learners returning to study after a protracted absence tend to experience difficulties in readjusting. This is not merely a problem with academic study.

The QAA (2006:6) review of the EYSEFD at Carshalton College highlighted the positive pastoral support received by the learners and commented that:

there is proactive support from tutors if they encounter problems and there is provision for additional tutorial support if mentoring arrangements fail.

Knight et al. (2006:7) commenting on aspects of pastoral care on an EYSEFD noted that although support was available in the first year it was:

less readily available from the second year as tutors adopted a more 'hands off' approach. Some learners felt this reflected their own growing confidence.

Group tutorial sessions provide the learners with the opportunity to discuss what is happening in their communities, the positive and negative elements and the impact of these on their personal and professional lives. Well planned tutorials can be instrumental in helping learners develop critical consciousness and enabling them to analyse, identify and interpret their lives to bring about qualitative change (Grant, 2006; Lago and Shipton, 1999; Yorke, 2004).

Currently, many HEIs are struggling to provide adequate pastoral support to their learners. National policy on Widening Participation has meant that those learners who were once considered as 'minority' within HE, such as those with 'non-traditional' qualifications, are now entering the field (Macdonald and Stratta, 2001:250). The continuing decline in per capita funding for undergraduates has exacerbated staff/learners ratios, making it more difficult for academic staff to get to know their tutees and offer appropriate support (Barlow and Antoniou, 2003; Duggan and Rice, 2005; Grant, 2006; Hostaker, 2000; McInnes, 2001). The rise of the non-traditional learner presents tutors with problems they had not previously anticipated (Barber et al. 2006; Christie et al. 2004; Hatt et al. 2003; Johnston, 2002; Lewis, 2002; Lorian, 1991; Yorke and Thomas, 2003) and this highlights the need to change approaches to teaching and formulate systems to support this diversity.

The perception of the roles of personal tutors at the University of Westminster has produced some interesting findings (Hixenbaugh et al. 2006). Learners cited the importance of tutors' accessibility as an important factor. Accessibility was broken down into practical and personal levels and most learners perceived that at a practical level tutors were accessible, but not on a personal level. As a result, none of the learners approached the tutors with personal issues and sought help and advice only for academic purposes. Learners perceived that their expectations of their tutors were based on past experiences of school and acknowledged that in HE they needed to familiarize themselves with different roles and expectations.

One of the more novel approaches to pastoral care relates to the increased use of e-learning has necessitated shifts in traditional tutoring methods and QAA (2004) considers online tutorial support to be an important element in the delivery of distance learning courses. Research by Crouch and Barrett (2006) indicated that tutors favoured some aspects such as responding to and initiating communication at their own pace, but found the lack of face-to face contact difficult 'due to more limited channels of feedback and a greater difficulty in clarifying meaning' (ibid:137) and there continues to be insufficient evidence regarding online tutoring (on EYSEFDs). Interestingly, Edge Hill University which offers a part-time distance learning Foundation degree in 'Supporting Teaching and Learning' to support staff in schools found that audio tools where the learners were able to hear their tutor speak to them

were positively received as learners preferred to communicate through 'talk' with tutors as well as other learners and; distance learning' took on a different meaning.

Current research on Foundation degrees has revealed (O' Keefe and Tait, 2004) that learners benefited from coming together on a regular basis and taking part in discussions. Face-to face meetings with other learners and tutors bonded them into communities of practice. Schwandt (2003:312) reiterates this point stating that:

knowledge of what others are doing and saying always depends upon some background or context of other meanings, beliefs, values, practices.

As Lave and Wenger (1991:109) note:

The purpose is not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate participation, it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate participation.

It is important to consider whether online tutoring would generate similar sentiments. Another factor which needs to be considered is that there is often an assumption that learners are IT proficient when dealing with this format. Given the historical neglect of skills updating in this area, many learners on the EYSEFD courses might not possess the IT skills necessary to facilitate online tutoring. For online tutoring to be successful, systems which support this form of learning need to be established and staff need to be familiar with the technology.

3.6.2 Study Skills

In discussing learner support both Garrigan (1997) and more recently Counsell (2006) emphasise that colleges need to empower the learner to develop skills that will enable them to 'cope' with the demands of HE. These include developing study skills techniques which will facilitate the learners progress in writing essays, putting forward an objective argument, analysing a range of materials and so on. Goddard and Penketh (2007) and Greenbank (2007) explored the experiences of learners in transition from a Foundation degree to a final year honours degree. The research indicated that many learners experienced anxiety regarding their academic reading and writing skills. Research by Dixon et al. (2005) found that learners felt that they needed more help with writing, referencing and plagiarism and literature review.

Study skills are an integral part of the course offer for this EYSEFD. Access courses have always included study skills as part of their course delivery as learners on these programmes are mature entrants to HE and need to develop their study skills techniques. Cornwall College (Counsell, 2006:20) are offering 'HE bite size' courses which include study skills to 'equip the Cornish workforce with HE level skills' to build confidence to participate in HE amongst those who would traditionally not have considered entering HE. Snape and Finch (2006) in their research on an EYSEFD commented that around two thirds of the learners received help through study skills sessions and appeared to have benefited from it. Similarly, learners on the EYSEFD at Carlshton College praised the study skills support they received, which they said helped them with their WBL assignments (QAA, 2006).

The acquisition of study skills are critical for learners who are second language speakers as they sometimes struggle with the nuances of academic writing such as the need to develop a stylistically appropriate tone and move away from using features which are evocative of oral speech (Connor, 1996; Crew, 1990; Gilmore, 2004). Learners often retain traces of the grammatical peculiarities of their first language in their writing. For example, French speakers have a tendency to overuse lexical and grammatical features of speech such as first and second pronouns but rarely use some of the characteristics of formal writing such as nouns and prepositions (Granger and Rayson, 1998). Ivanic (2004) has commented that an emphasis on register enables learners to understand and practice the roles of convention in academic writing. The ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learnt through an exposure to formal instructional settings such as school and further and higher educational institutions and involves a range of skills which encompass creative writing on one end of the spectrum and mechanical writing on the other (Fabb and Durant, 1993; Omaggio Hadley, 1993).

This chapter has explored the benefits and drawbacks of WBL. The tensions which exist within the framework of WBL have been examined from a range of perspectives including employers, learners and universities. In addition, other support infrastructures such as pastoral care and study skills that support mature learners and WBL have been discussed. The following chapter discusses the methodology

employed in the research in attempting to answer the research questions posed in the introduction.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Context

Between 2003 and 2005, 6,662 learners enrolled on Foundation degree programmes and by 2008/2009 this had increased to 87, 000 (Tatum, 2009). Although there are no specific figures HEFCE data (2007) indicates that Foundation degrees in Early Years have witnessed steady and popular growth. It was decided to focus the research on three FECs which were all part of the Sector Endorsed Foundation degree (Sector endorsed by Sure Start). These three colleges were some of the first to offer the EYSEFD in the country and the qualification for all three FECs was validated by one named university. This ensured that the learners on the Foundation degree programme would have access to the named university to complete their degree programme. The three FECs delivered a common curriculum, shared one external verifier and most staff teaching on the programme had an opportunity to meet one in meetings and occasionally, through visits to the individual colleges.

The research questions that framed the research undertaken were:

- What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?
- What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL?

4.2 Research paradigm

A mixed method approach was used to allow working with different types of data and analytic methods in a single study. In recent years there has been an increasing use and interest in the employment of this mixed method by researchers such as Bagnoli (2004); Blatchford (2005); Coxon (2005); Deren et al. (2003) and Sammons et al.

(2005). Blatchford (2005) and Sammons et al. (2005) employed a mixed method approach research which focussed on improving children's attainment and development through family based support and children's social, cognitive and emotional influences in Key Stage 2 and Coxon (2005) similarly utilized this approach in a study of gay men's sexual behaviour and asked participants to keep diaries which had a structured and unstructured component. The structured format related to the research question and was recorded, whilst the unstructured format allowed the participants to write a narrative of their sexual behaviour. The diaries which generated qualitative and quantitative data enabled Coxon (2005) to blend his findings. Bagnoli (2004) too used a mixed approach in a study of young people's identities in England and Italy in which the participants kept diaries; provided photographs which represented them and their lives; drew schematic representations of their lives and participated in two open-ended interviews. She used the data to examine the construction of identity and established links among the different types of data as they were

'different parts pertaining to the same whole' (ibid:6.13).

However, critics of this method point out that there is insufficient emphasis on the underlying philosophical issues and lacks paradigmatic and theoretical grounding (Datta, 1994; Samdahl, 1999).

The researcher felt that the use of interpretive approach ensured that there was sufficient dialogue between the researcher and the participants as the researcher was aware that reality is socially constructed and that people make meaning of this reality through the lenses of their cultures, social setting and relationships with other people (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The researcher understood that an understanding of the world is a creation of the mind and 'there is no objective knowledge which is independent of thinking, reasoning humans' (Gephart, 1994:4). By employing the interpretive paradigm a researcher is able to observe the different approaches and reactions of the participants and this can also lead to a number of possible solutions and interpretations. As a result, the function of epistemology in an interpretive paradigm is the acquisition of knowledge through the perceptions/realities of the participants and the focus is on uncovering knowledge about why and how people

think in different circumstance rather than attempting to make judgements on the validity of the thoughts or feelings (Angen, 2000). The researcher was aware that validity or truth could not be grounded in an objective reality as the perception of valid or truth is /has been negotiated (through experience and cultural capital) and there can be numerous claims to knowledge or truth depending on a host of factors.

Critics point out that it is difficult to generalise results and the subjectivity leads to results which can be difficult to analyse and interpret in an objective way. However, there is an understanding amongst researchers that it is difficult to be objective in human research compared to scientific research.

The 'knowledge society' increasingly relies on credentials as a benchmark of skills acquisition and this research explores the benefits to practitioners and employers of WBL, pastoral support and study skills and examines the value of this new qualification for all the stakeholders. Given the research question, using a mixed method approach enabled the researcher to hear different voices and multiple constructions of experiences (Mason, 2006; Moran and Butler, 2001), reflect and report on the complexity (Coyle and Williams, 2000; Deren et al. 2003) of Foundation degrees through the perceptions of the stakeholders (employers and learners) and demonstrate that knowledge can be both qualitative and quantitative (Bowker, 2001; Coxon, 2005; Pawson, 1995). The researcher was of the opinion that a mixed method approach could provide stronger evidence for conclusion through convergence and collaboration of findings, and exploring issues which were interconnected such as teaching and learning methods and peer discussions which encourage critical thought or contradictions such as effective pastoral care not necessarily affecting retention or achievement. Employing a mixed method aided in examining similarities such as development of reflective practice through WBL, new perspectives relating to Foundation degrees in understanding the qualification and relating it the wider debate concerning the value of this qualification and the perceived benefits to learners and employers.

The mixed method approach allowed for the exploration of phenomena in their natural setting and enabled utilisation of multiple methods in an attempt to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them. This ensured optimal utilisation and

analysis of gathered information (Cresswell, 2003; Cresswell and Plano, 2007; Fielding and Schreier, 2001; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, 2003; Weinrich, 2006), an opportunity to report on the complex and developing interactions of events and relationships that impact on particular circumstances and the complex factors which facilitate or impede facets such as self-esteem and recognition of habitus. This complementarity (Greene et al. 1989; Greene and Caracelli, 1997; Gorard and Taylor, 2004; Kelle, 2001) allowed the researcher to reveal different dimensions such as learners beginning to understand their 'habitus' through pastoral care, WBL, class discussions and allowed scrutiny of topics from different viewpoints (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mason, 2006; Nash, 2002; Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003).

Contrary to criticisms (Datta, 1994; Samadahl, 1999), a mixed method was used, above other methods, because the research question and its context could not be separated. This approach was used because it suited the needs of the small-scale researcher and facilitated understanding of issues within the context of Foundation degrees, and enhanced the reliability of the research findings which would not have been possible with the employment of a single method (Brannen, 2005; Bullock, 1993; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

4.3 The population

Three FEFCs were involved in this study each given pseudonyms. These colleges were in south-east London, they were of comparable sizes and each served what generally speaking was a lower socio-economic area. There is some truth in the assertion that these further education colleges provided local community with a second chance at education beyond the compulsory school years, and with a mechanism to move into university level education. The colleges were purposively selected (Curtis et al. 2000) on the basis of practical access and a stated interest in developing the quality of the learner experience of students on early years programmes. It is acknowledged that this will limit the generalisability of my findings.

4.4 The sample

The sample comprised two groups:

- i. Learners: The selection criteria for the sample were that all learners who took part in this study were working at least two days a week with children

aged 0- 8 years and had obtained a level 2 qualification in childcare. The learners who took part in this study were mature women who encompassed a wide range of experiences.

- ii. Five employers: two from Local Authorities, two from the voluntary sector and one located within Further Education sector.

The data in table 4.1 indicates the number of learners who completed the questionnaire and the number later interviewed, college by college. The sample of learners was selected only from those learners enrolled in an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree. The data in table 4.2 shows data collected from employers.

Table 4.1: Number of questionnaires collected and interviews undertaken

Institutions	Completed Questionnaires	% of available learners	Learners Interviewed	% of available learners interviewed
College Aristotle	4	61	7	100%
College Balzac	15	88	10	58%
College Cervantes	18	95	11	63%

Table 4.2: Data from employers

Number of employers interviewed	5
Numbers of employers completing questionnaires	5

4.5 Data Gathering Instruments

Questionnaires and interviews were used for the collection of data in this mixed method approach. Questionnaires were used to gather data on the background information of respondents and also to identify additional topics. These included assessments, pastoral care, and teaching and learning strategies. The questionnaires aided in the assessment and evaluation of emerging themes, (Appendix 1 and 2).

4.5.1 Questionnaires for learners

A seven-item instrument was designed to measure the responses on a Likert scale. Respondents were also able to complete any additional comments on an otherwise blank page. Thirty-seven learners completed this questionnaire where items 1 to 4 were about WBL, item 5 focussed on study skills and items 6 and 7 focussed on pastoral care (details of items can be found in Appendix 1).

Clear and precise instructions on completing the questionnaires were supplied. This included an attachment of a brief description of the research and guidelines for completing the questionnaire (Bulmer, 2004; Bradburn et al. 2004; Oppenheim, 1992; Wilson and McLean, 1994). Individual items were based on the literature and developed in the context of the research questions: a fit-for-purpose instrument was designed. Amendments were made to the instrument following its pilot, and this final instrument was administered.

4.5.2 Questionnaires for employers

Five employers completed the questionnaires. For the employers Questions 1-9 focussed on WBL, work based assessments and motivation of staff (details on questions can be found in Appendix 2). Unlike the questionnaires for learners it was difficult to conduct a pilot run for employers as the researcher discovered that employers appeared to be far too busy to take part in a pilot run.

4.5.3 Validity and reliability

The importance of piloting questionnaires was recognised as it increases their validity and reliability (Bradburn et al. 2004; Oppenheim, 1992). Learners on a different course and a group of employers who had learners studying NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) were given questionnaires. The pilot revealed that some of the questions were unclear. An example was 'Equal opportunities policies are rigorously adhered to'. The respondents found the language difficult and were unsure whether to comment on the policy of the college, their course or the careers they intend to follow. This became clear from the responses that were either not in context or tackled a different issue completely unrelated to the question. This question was removed from the questions as it became apparent that it did not have relevance in the context of

WBL and Foundation degrees. It also became clear that some questions had been posed within questions that confused learners such as 'My teachers are knowledgeable and approachable' seemed confusing as they felt they needed to respond to two qualities of teachers simultaneously. Questions were amended or revised appropriately.

4.5.4 Data analysis: Questionnaires

After analysing the results from the questionnaires the emerging themes were placed into the themes discussed in Chapter 5. These themes formed the basis for the questions in the interviews.

4.6 Interviewing learners

All the interviews with learners were conducted as focus group interviews. The maximum size for the interviews was 11 and the minimum size was 7. The interview questions included some items about WBL, others about pastoral care and one on study skills (Details of questions can be found in Appendix 3).

The interviews were intended to enable the researcher to gain deeper insights into feelings and attitudes regarding particular subjects and in to discover what led them to form opinions (Cohen et al. 2000, 2001; Fern, 2001; Kidd and Marshall, 2000; Morgan and Spanish, 1984; Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Focus groups have been used since 1930s (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1998, 1999; Morgan, 1996) and Morgan (1996) describes them as a research tool that enables collection of data through group interaction on a specific topic determined by the researcher. Morgan (1998) comments that focus groups and the resultant group interaction produces data and insight which would have been hard to access otherwise and Kvale (1996) has noted that the interview process enables the participants to give their interpretations and discuss these issues from their own point of view.

The purpose of the interview then was to discuss in depth some of the themes that had emerged from the analysis of the questionnaires. Using this method allowed the participants an opportunity to talk and discuss common issues in a comprehensive manner (Ashar and Lane, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Patten 2002; Patton, 2002). For instance, the interview enabled them to give examples of incidents that might have

occurred in schools affecting their choice of careers, their perception of themselves and how this impacted on them personally. What were the differences between their experiences at school and College? It was felt that the interview forum might allow for a wider picture of the factors that have influenced them and not concur with other peoples' viewpoints. Additionally, the interview process was likely to draw out the personal experiences of the individuals, the differences in the colleges and the universities and the analysis of the answers would reveal the changes that might need to be implemented on the course. It has also been suggested that the participants are empowered as a result of feeling valued and their perceptions acknowledged (Byron, 1995), working collaboratively with researchers (Gibbs, 1997) and articulating their views (Panyan et al. 1997).

The focus group interviews for the learners (Appendix 3) were conducted at the individual colleges after prior permission from the course tutors and programme area leaders. Employers (Appendix 4) were interviewed separately. Studies conducted by Cannell and Kahn (1968) demonstrated that validity in interviews poses many problems as it is difficult to be objective and avoid bias, as interviewers and interviewees bring their own personal experiences (positive and negative) into the interview situation. In order to minimise bias the interview questions were thought through carefully and a checklist (Appendix 5) prepared to make sure that all points were covered. The participants were informed about the schedule and the format of the interview. Interviews generate a host of emotions. The researcher paid particular attention to aspects such as body language and facial expression ensuring all were of a positive nature and did not make the interviewees feel that the response to his/her answers was significant. The researcher was aware of group dynamics (Greenbaum, 2000; Silverman, 2004) and made certain that everyone was given 'space' to air their views and experiences. In effect, the researcher was the facilitator and managed the flow of conversation.

The interview questions comprised both open-ended and closed questions (Krueger and Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997). The first questions elicited data about the course and then focussed on specific subject matter. Dates and times of interviews were pre-arranged with course tutors and course coordinators and conducted with minimal disruption to teaching. In some instances the interviews took place before or after the

class or in lunch breaks. Due care and attention was paid to the importance of anonymity and confidentiality in the sensitive handling of participants' data. Procedures were put in place to secure written notes and taped interviews and consent was sought at all stages. All participants took part voluntarily, with informed consent and with the understanding that they could withdraw at any time.

The rationale for the interview and the recording process was reiterated to the group and further questions answered. Kvale (1996) suggests that the important aspect of interviewing is to bear in mind that interviews are essentially a social interpersonal encounter and the interviewer must follow unwritten social rules. These include being polite and attentive to the respondents and to conduct the interview in a sympathetic manner. The group were asked to introduce themselves so that the researcher could make a note of their names for the purpose of coding later. Ground rules were agreed between the group which included points such as not engaging in private conversations, directing all comments to the group and not interrupting. Once these rules had been agreed and the group were comfortable, the researcher began by asking questions which could be answered with ease for example 'Which module did you enjoy the most?' Gradually other questions relating to issues such as assessments, pastoral care were included in the interview.

Attention and thought was paid to the role of the researcher as a facilitator prior to the Focus Group interviews (Krueger, 1988; Krueger and Casey 2000; Morgan, 1997) which was to guide the discussion and interject as necessary and the researcher was aware that the success of the interview depended on many factors including body language and facial expression of the researcher. Furthermore, Patton's (1990), Stewart et al. (2007) and Puchta and Potter's (2004) suggestions of keeping motivated and interested by avoiding too many factual questions ensured that the questions were clear and easily understood by the respondents. Additionally, the language was pitched at the level of the respondents' understanding and the interviewing room was free from distractions. Each topic was exhausted before moving on to another and summarised at an appropriate juncture (Field and Morse, 1989).

4.6.1 Employer interviews

Five employers were interviewed. The questions for the employers focussed on their views and experiences of work-based assessments, the impact on their employee and the partnership with the Colleges. (Details on Questions can be found in Appendix 4). The interview process followed a similar format as that for learners.

4.6.2 Data analysis: Interviews

Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed and listened to and themes identified and annotated and put into clusters (Bell, 1999; Field and Morse, 1992). This content analysis was achieved through analysing and noting down the frequency of repetition by the respondents in the different institutions. This allowed for a fuller understanding of the data which was triangulated by comparing and contrasting the comments made across the colleges. Exhaustive notes (over a period of several months) were made. A checklist (Appendix 7) was devised to help with consistency in analysis and regular breaks from listening to the tapes facilitated revisiting the tapes with greater objectivity.

4.6.3 Validity

Interviews were conducted with a pilot group and changes were then made to the wordings of some of the questions. Following Patton's (1990) view the order of the questions was changed as asking non threatening questions in the beginning puts the respondents at ease and enables them to answer more fully. The order of asking questions followed the same pattern at each institution and this ensured reliability.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

In answering the question 'what is ethics?' the researcher was drawn to two quotes from writers who emphasise that truth in any research is of paramount importance. Firstly, Cavan (1997:56) advises that ethics is a

matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others, being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature'.

The second quote is from Marshall (1998:556) who defines research ethics as

The application of moral rules and professional code of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting and publication of information about research subjects, in particular active acceptance of subjects' right to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent.

British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidelines were consulted in order to ensure that all aspects relating to undertaking research had been considered. So, in asking respondents to answer the questions the following protocol was observed.

Informed consent – Principals and course tutors of each FEC and employers were written to detailing the research (Appendix 6). Their consent was sought before proceeding. The research brief was outlined, the possible benefits to the participants, colleges, universities and policymakers and clarification was as to who would have access to the research. In the FECs information was requested about learners who might have additional needs e.g. visual or hearing impairments or dyslexia. The rationale for asking this information was so that adjustments could be made to the format and layout of questionnaires such as larger font, using coloured paper and arrange for a signer/interpreter in case there was a learner with hearing impairment (Appendix 6).

Confidentiality - The methods of recording (questionnaires and interviews) were explained to all the learners as well as the issues of confidentiality. Learners were informed that completing the questionnaire and agreeing to take part in the interviews was voluntary and at no point should they feel pressurised into participating and explained that they had the right to withdraw at any point (BERA, 2011; Cresswell, 2002, 2005; Fine et al. 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Shaw, 2003). They were assured that the course tutors would not have access to the information and the exercise was confidential to the researcher and other learners. All queries were clarified before the questionnaires were handed out or interviews arranged and the anonymity of the research stressed along with the ethical obligation of the researcher to protect the anonymity of research participants and keep all data confidential. All these issues were readdressed with learners, employers and tutors where necessary

in the time lapse between the completion questionnaires and the interviews. Permission was sought from learners to send questionnaires to their employers and reiterated that this was voluntary. Once agreed, explanation of the research and questionnaires were sent to employers.

4.8 Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of the methodology was the use of only a small purposive sample of learners. Stake (1995) comments that limitations placed on most researchers necessitate the use of samples which are easy to access. In this instance, it would have been difficult to find a large purposive sample as Foundation degrees had only newly been introduced and few colleges within manageable reach were offering the EYSEFD. The researcher was unable to facilitate a wider study due to time and resource allocation. Additionally, as a new and developing qualification the researcher was aware that there were variations in curriculum content and delivery and was keen to ensure that the chosen sample for the research was consistent in curriculum delivery. Again, as some of the focus of this research was on WBL the researcher felt that there might be variations in the understanding of WBL (e.g. how many days or hours) across different institutions. The three FECs in this study had stipulated that all learners on the EYSEFD need to be working at least two days in a voluntary or paid capacity within the 0-8 age group. This ensured that all the three FECs were following the same curriculum and linked to the same university which would award the degree. There are many benefits to using a purposive sample. Dane (1990) states that the purposive sample allows the researcher to home in on people or events that will inform the research question and Denscombe (1998) argues that purposive sampling is not only be economical but also informative in a way that conventional probability sampling cannot be. It also permitted the selection of interviewees whose experiences were directly related to the research question and

their perspectives, point of view and lived experience could be reported (Silverman 2004:344).

Furthermore as Dane (1990) has pointed out purposive sampling allows the researcher to home in on events which are pertinent to the research question and therefore critical to the research. The aim of the study was to explore the quality of the data not the quantity (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992).

This chapter has outlined the rationale for the employment of a mixed method approach for this research and the possible limitations of this methodology in answering the research questions:

RQ1: What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?

RQ2: What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL?

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The findings are presented under the two questions posed at the outset, namely:

RQ1: What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?

RQ2: What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL?

Each question is addressed in turn with signposting of key themes.

RQ 1: What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?

The key theme that emerged from the data centred on carrying out observations as part of assessed assignments, specifically that: learners experienced a range of difficulties specifically in relation to the time it took to carry out mandatory observations; the difficulty of finding appropriate children to observe; uncertainty about the length of observations; uncertainty about the amount of writing required and not having access to confidential background information on the children.

5.1. Theme 1: Issues arising from the need to carry out observations as part of assessed assignments

Twenty learners out of thirty seven from the three colleges expressed strong opinions about the assessments on the course with particular emphasis on the observation element in the assessments. For example, there were some observations that the learners found especially difficult to organise and conduct: These related to the age of children available and those children with special needs. 12 out of 28 learners perceived some types of observations to be difficult because they did not work with children in the requisite age range. This meant that they had to conduct observations

outside of their own workplace and as a result, problems were encountered that included finding a setting that would agree to the observation being carried out, seeking permission from the carers of the child, negotiating observation time with the setting and finally, negotiating times and dates with their current workplace to conduct the observation. These were serious practical issues that made observation, and therefore assignment completion problematic. It appears that this central aspect of early years work based learning on the Foundation Degree was given inadequate attention by curriculum developers. The outcome is to undermine learners' learning, confidence and progression.

It was so difficult you know I had to go ask the manager of this setting for permission, then write to the parents and then ask my manager for time so that I could go and do this observation. (C8)

So much time got wasted and I got behind with everything my own work and my College work. (A1)

Three learners (C3, C7 and C2) commented that the assessments would have been easier to handle if they were given a choice of observations to carry out as this would have allowed for flexibility in their approach and would have reduced stress levels.

If there was a choice like you can do this or this it would be so much easier....
(C3)

In my setting we did not have a child in that age range and that made it so difficult (C 7)

You could have alternative assessments that met the criteria it did not need to be so rigid (C2)

In addition, learners commented on the lack of guidelines on assessments, on the grading criteria and the approximate word length. Four learners (A1, A3, A4, and A5) felt that there was inconsistency in the depth of observation amongst individuals.

I put so much work in it, wrote lots so that I could write a good essay (A4)

whilst A5 said

some people just wrote one page and I wrote at least three pages, I just thought how can you get any data if you write so little?

5.2.1 Discussion

It is apparent that observations as part of the assessment process caused considerable difficulties for learners from all three FECs. The main stumbling block was the lack of specific guidelines regarding the observations and ambiguity in relation to the length, number and the time they took to complete. Additionally, some assessments could not be undertaken as the learners did not work in settings which allowed them the flexibility of conducting a range of observations.

The Foundation degree benchmark (QAA, 2004:4) specifies that the assessment strategy

should reflect the type of learning/learner and the nature of each element of study within the qualification

Luckett and Sutherland (2000:102) emphasise this point when they state that:

If purposes of assessment remain implicit and vague, there is danger that different purposes become confused and conflated, so that assessment as a consequence fails to play an educative role.

A central issue was that although the carrying out of observations in the early years workplace was mandatory, the observations were not formally assessed whilst the accompanying essay was, thus signalling to the learner that the observations were not important. It is apparent from the research findings that the assignments set on the Foundation degree programme were not playing an 'educative role'. The opportunity to analyse learners' responses to their observations was restricted to a formal essay

and the learners were not provided with an opportunity to have their inferences assessed. Moreover, there appeared to be confusion across all groups in this research regarding the role of the observations, the manner in which they were to be linked and used in the essay and finally there was uncertainty about the marking criteria to be used in assessing the quality of these essays. As such it is not surprising that some learners were unable to demonstrate their knowledge and experience, match theory with practice and critically reflect as they were not provided opportunities to extend their learning or ability to analyse. Dewey (1938) stated that educators need to set out the curriculum in a manner which takes into account the learners' past experiences and then uses this experience as a platform; the subject matter can be delivered in a way that will open up rather than shut down a learner's future growth.

This study has demonstrated that assessment based on observations carried out in the workplace was inadequately thought through in terms of exactly how the observations were to be used in the essay. Further, the repeated use of observations and essays provided a worryingly narrow approach to assessment. One of the features of Foundation degrees is the incorporation of WBL into the curriculum delivery (Challis, 2005; Cheri/LSN, 2008; Doyle and O'Doherty, 2006; East Midlands Development Agency, 2005; Johnson and Lockley, 2005; Matthews et al. 2007; Rammell and Longhurst, 2007) and Fdf (2005) has referred to this aspect as 'a potentially radical approach to connecting work with learning'. Beany (2006:11) comments that:

the main thing that makes Foundation degrees of wider interest than simply a new form of employment focused provision is that they are potentially groundbreaking in terms of their conception and delivery. They are also an ongoing experiment in educational re-engineering since they are implicated in a wide range of government policy agendas...it is this that makes them an exemplary case for research.

In this study, however, there were no groundbreaking elements as the assessments were not considered by either learners or tutors to be 'fit for purpose.' This resulted in issues of quality assurance. The assessment led to confusion amongst learners and tutors. Learners commented that, as early years practitioners, they were familiar with conducting and interpreting observations as an integral part of their job, however, in

this case no merit was given to these skills as marks were only awarded for the quality of the essay and not for the observation itself.

It is evident that some learners, on realising that no marks were to be awarded for the observations focussed solely on the essay which was graded. This would seem to support the observations of Gibbs and Simpson (2002:502) that some learners:

work out for themselves what counts – or at least what they think counts, and orient their efforts accordingly. They are strategic in their use of time and ‘selectively negligent’ in avoiding content that they believe is not likely to be assessed.

The indication is that some learners benefitted from this tactic but it raises questions of fairness and whether this was anticipated by the curriculum designers and how valuable this assessment was as a learning experience. The purpose of assessment ought not to focus on knowing the rules of the ‘game’ or bending the rules, but rather should concentrate on producing the required evidence that demonstrates an understanding of a particular topic. It is obvious that some learners became aware of the loopholes in the assessment criteria and were able to manipulate this to their advantage. However, in obtaining the grades they did not necessarily display an understanding of the subject matter but merely an ability to manipulate the assessment criteria to their advantage.

Jordan and Putz (2004:346) state that WBL assessment demonstrates:

recent thinking about measurement practice, put formal assessment in perspective, and recognises it as only one piece (albeit a significant one) of the varieties of judgements about performance that play a crucial role in schools, work places, and everyday life.

Whilst Gibbons et al. (1994:13) note:

the parallel expansion in the number of potential knowledge producers on the supply side and the expansion of the requirement of specialised knowledge on the demand side are creating the emergence of a new mode of knowledge production

This suggests the creation and development of new relationships and a moving away from established assessment methods. The HEI in this study did not take into account that the rigid assessment format did not give the learners scope and opportunity to demonstrate their understanding, knowledge or skills. The assessments were not 'fit for purpose' as they lacked validity, reliability and transparency. This pertinent quote from Boud (1995) sums up the learners' experience that 'learners can escape bad teaching, but they can't escape bad assessment'.

The use of observations, as an assessment technique did not allow the learners an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. Diversifying assessments would enable learners to demonstrate their learning and understanding of a particular subject and move away from a limited range of assessment methods which can result in measuring how skilled or indeed, unskilled, they are. Presentations can give learners an opportunity to discuss the subject and analyse it with reference to theory and the context of their workplace, supporting Race's view (2007:93) that

the most significant link between presentations and learning is the making sense which occurs...and learners are usually able to answer questions on the topic long after the event and that the learning is at a deeper level than if they had a written an essay.

The observations that proved to be most problematic were those involving children with SEN (Special Educational Need); multilingual and bi-lingual children. Learners remarked that they found the observation element particularly difficult as they did not have access to children with SEN. Difficulties ranged from negotiating observations with other providers, gaining consent from the parents and not being able to access data. The assessment requirements did not take into account factors such as, the age range of children, size of the organizations and confidentiality issues such as access to information without consent. Learners from College Cervantes and Balzac particularly emphasised this point as they worked in playgroups and nurseries which had smaller numbers of children and sometimes a particular cohort had no identifiable child with SEN or indeed a child who was bilingual. However, learners from College Aristotle did not appear to encounter these issues. This may be accounted for by the small number of learners in College Aristotle in comparison with the other two FECs.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Learners views on the value of WBL assessments in improving and understanding practice

It is apparent that WBL assessments enabled a range of benefits to be experienced by the learners. The support and discussion with others helped in sharing knowledge and stories through common vocabulary and an understanding of their work. Furthermore learners were able to compare the differences in practice and question whether they were in the interest of the children, facilitated their development as reflective practitioners and supported their growing understanding of their work in relation to unspoken agendas.

Learners highlighted the benefits of WBL assessments pointing out:

There are many positive aspects to work based assessment. One of them being, that you have the ability to put what you learn on the course into practice. What I learn on the course helps me to challenge my practice and I am constantly learning and implementing new ideas. (B3)

just saying a few big words gave her a great feeling of confidence. (B1)

I was really interested in listening to how this setting had integrated a multilingual child. I was full of ideas and as I had a very supportive manager. I told her about it and we tried it out. We had good success! (A2)

Eighteen out of twenty-eight learners from the three colleges spoke about the learning that had taken place on the course and reported reading and researching topics not related to their assignments. Learners stated that this was unusual for them as more usually they concerned themselves with completing assignments and looking only for relevant information to complete them. One student put it this way:

just enough information to help me complete the assignment. (C1)

One example was the module on Health. As part of the assignment the learners were asked to carry out a health related activity and learners reported that they engaged in

an extensive amount of research into healthy eating and determining terms and their meaning.

I began to think about what the term health actually meant and how different cultures have different interpretations of it. (B10)

She noted that when she reflected on her own upbringing, what she now considered healthy was quite different from that of her mother when she was a child. One Irish student (A1) commented that a child who is fat is called '*well fed*' and how this might actually reflect culture. She went on to explain that with possible links to Ireland's history of famine, a fat child was seen as a well fed child even though the child would be considered unhealthy by today's standards. Some learners ((C1, B9 and C2) commented that when discussing or writing about a subject they took into account factors such as race, gender, culture etc.

Four learners (A1, A3, A4 and A5) mentioned that the unit focussing on the importance of play encouraged thought on the different interpretations of the meaning of play depending upon their backgrounds. The learners commented on how the tutor had linked the lesson to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and discussed: 'Does solitary play achieve self actualization?' The learners commented that they had had to think 'hard and long' because they had not associated play with this notion.

This was the first time I was thinking of play like this – I had never come across this idea. (A5)

The learners mentioned that they had viewed play only as a collaborative exercise and relating it to solitary play and self actualisation was revelatory. They had begun to reflect more on the children they worked with, those who had come as refugees or those who had witnessed war related crimes and had been forced to be alone for long periods of time. They began to question the function of play for these children.

Three learners (C4, C9 and C10) commented on the development of reflective practice.

I could see what was not being done in my workplace – and it was not all about resources. You could have good practice if you changed attitudes. (C9)

Others, however, felt that they would be overruled in decision making for various reasons.

The people in our nursery just won't like any extra effort or work – they just like to do the things in exactly the same way all the time (C10)

I thought, the manager just wants to save money, she won't advertise for another post! Only when we all get really fed up with working so hard – then she will. (A6)

Four learners (A4, A5, A3 and A6) commented that the discussions in class enabled them to put themselves in the position of being a practitioner and reflect on the way they worked on a personal level rather than attempting changes in the workplace.

Even though I knew that I could not change many things about my workplace at least I could change the way I work. (A4)

5.2.3 Discussion

King (1997) proposes that WBL can lead to construction of new knowledge' and McPeck (1981:8) has suggested that the core meaning of critical thinking is the propensity and skill to engage in an activity with reflective scepticism.

This was demonstrated when one learner referred to a child being 'well fed' and commented on the different interpretations – firstly the origin and the implications of those words as a result of the Irish Potato Famine and secondly, the unhealthy interpretation of the same term in modern day living. As Lechte (1994:109) quoting Derrida (1973) succinctly puts it,

everyday language is not neutral; it bears within it the presuppositions and cultural assumptions of a whole tradition and attempting to understand this tradition can result 'unexpectedly, in a new emphasis on the individual autonomy and creativeness of the researcher/philosopher/reader.'

The learner was able to trace the evolution of those words taking into account historical and social factors and displayed aspects of critical thinking which included clear, coherent and logical thinking on a subject or a range of subjects, a healthy scepticism about claims and assertions, taking into account all relevant factors and being aware of weaknesses and possible motives and maintaining a non-biased stand (Beyer, 1987; Garside, 1996; McPeck, 1981). Development of critical thinking skills was clearly demonstrated when learners commented on how they took a number of factors into account such as race, gender and culture when examining topics. In doing this, they delved into the presented data and scrutinized a host of factors that might influence outcomes. This manner of thinking has also been termed 'double loop thinking' by Argyris (1982) as learners were moving away from an immediate cause and effect reaction and challenging basic assumptions behind policies and ideas, testing hypotheses and beginning to understand that processes are disconfirmable not 'self seeking'. Other learners commented on the development of interest in subjects which were not necessarily related to the assignment and it was apparent that they had begun to look beyond the parameters of their assignments and actively look for information not directly connected to their assignment. The interest in the information was self activated and they were able to utilise this in their practice, in thinking about their own culture and understanding layers of complexities within the subject matter. The learners were not learning in isolation, but rather their learning encompassed their everyday social world. As Davis et al. (2000:67) comment that learning:

is always collective: embedded in, enabled by, and constrained by the social phenomenon of language, caught up in layers of history and tradition.

Learners were motivated to learn both intrinsically and extrinsically. The intrinsic satisfaction was derived from the self confidence and self esteem and the extrinsic through acknowledgement of their peers as in the case of one learner who talked about 'saying a few big words' (B1, pg.49, line 26) and how this raised her credibility in the workplace. It is apparent that their orientation towards learning is changed through incorporation of deep and surface learning and through 'unwrapping' the shroud of silence' (Brookfield, 1988:136) which covered their practice and examination of it. The shroud of silence refers to those learners who were able to challenge some of the

practices at work and introduce changes as in the case of one learner who was able to take and implement ideas on integration of a multilingual child. In this instance, the differing attitudes by the employers are apparent as in the previous paragraphs learners did not feel able to facilitate any changes because of the power culture of the organization. The data in this study suggests that organizations that value their employees understand the importance of learning and development (Berger and Luckman, 1979; Gibb, 2003).

Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasise that learning takes place when practitioners are involved in engagement with their practice and the participation

is a way of learning of both absorbing and being absorbed in the culture of practice (ibid. 93).

Learners have focused on becoming active in the workplace through confidence in contributing, challenging some practices in the workplace and working with and against tensions that permeate them. Learners were building capacity within themselves by using their new-found knowledge to understand contradictions and attempt to find solutions as in the case of one learner who commented that, 'I am constantly learning and implementing new ideas' (B3, Pg73, line 20).

This study in answering the research question: What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?, has ascertained that for some learners, studying on the Foundation degree programme enabled them to develop what Eraut (1994) terms 'personal knowledge' namely the personal meanings that individuals ascribe to their experience. Furthermore, it would also appear that the learners were employing Dewey's (1933) view that reflection is a tool which can be used for problem solving, thinking to resolve issues which require the linking of a number of ideas and facts. Reflection also enabled the learners to think about, 'integral combination of sayings-doings-thinkings-feelings and valuings (Gee, 1990:1).

WBL enabled some learners to employ Mode 2 (Edwards and Usher, 2000; Gibbons et al. 1994; Luke, 1996) knowledge in their workplaces as their 'education, knowledge

and skills' were located in the workplace and facilitated problem solving skills which were specific to the context whilst at the same time demonstrating an awareness of other factors which might impact on the decision. The learners formed themselves into a community of practice and learning and as Lave and Wenger (1991:53) state:

Learning only partly and often incidentally – implies becoming able to be involved in new activities, perform new tasks and functions, to master new understandings. Activities, tasks, functions and understanding do not exist in isolation; they are part of a broader system of relations in which they have meaning.

It could be argued that learners were challenging their 'comfort zones' of professional practice and were willing to:

sustain and protract that sense of doubt which is the stimulus to thorough inquiry (Dewey, 1933:176).

This was clearly demonstrated when learners referred to play and self actualization and mentioned that the tutor linked this to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Learners were surprised at this link and discovered that the concept of play went beyond anything they had previously considered. As one learner said:

I was thinking of play like this – I had never come across this idea (A5, pg.74 line 26).

Learners were then able to use this idea to investigate the function of play for refugee children or those that had witnessed war crimes. Research by Mowlam et al. (2003) and Mowlam and Snape (2003) on the EYSEFD found that most learners commented that WBL was perceived as an effective way of learning and enabled them to reflect on their practice as their perception of contexts was built over a period of time and through experience that produced multiple ways of engendering knowledge and understanding (Henderson, 1991; Merriam, 1988). Dewey (1933) saw the human mind as a meaning making organ, trying to make sense and meaning of the world and his model of the five phases of reflection (suggestion, intellectualization, development of hypothesis, elaboration of hypothesis and testing the hypothesis) fits well with

changes which early years practitioners consistently need to accommodate. However, the sequence of these stages is not fixed and not all stages need to occur.

This position is contrary to research by QAA (2005) which found that:

many learners were achieving practical and vocational skills at the expense of higher-level, intellectual, analytical and reflective outcome.

This study in addressing the research question: What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree? has established the development of analytical and critical skills by learners. These skills took various forms from considering how to improve practice to an understanding of the wider issues impacting on managerial skills and other related agendas.

The discussions with learners from College Cervantes enabled reflection on the practices in the workplace, focussing on changing attitudes towards problems in order to work co-operatively to achieve results. Learners from College Aristotle appear to have grasped the consequence of senior management not 'coming on board' with initiatives and the implications of this to their professional development and their practice with children. Furthermore, they were able to comprehend and articulate that merely acquiring resources did not necessarily provide a solution to resolving problems as different approaches can be as effective in leading to successful results. The learners' comments echo Dewey's (1938/1991:51) thoughts that:

meanings of words, actions and observations are not fixed but continuously renegotiated within the context of active inquiry.

Learners in this study were displaying thinking about issues at varying levels of complexity and were beginning to demonstrate what Huberman (1993) has termed 'evolution of motives' as they were actively thinking about the motives of people in the organization: for example, the manager who wanted to save money and the reluctance of some practitioners to move out of their comfort zone when changes were initiated. They were able to question and examine the motives of the organization, staff and managers. This process of questioning and relating new ideas to previous knowledge led them to an understanding of the different motives that drive individuals and organizations. Learners' statements reveal the development of thinking skills and

the beginnings of a solution focused approach to problems through reviewing and constructing the reality of their work, self reflection and becoming aware of the dynamics of their organizations. O’Keefe and Tait (2004:29) point out that this combination of meeting in college and discussing what happens at work offers the learners opportunities to talk to each other and through reflection:

engage with the course content and examine their own uniquely textualised perceptions in order to challenge their own understandings, beliefs and practices.

Learners, through dialogue with other learners and their tutors, were able to arrive at self-understanding about their work (Billett, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Tierney and Slack, 2005) and Molander (1992:23) reiterated this point when he stated:

As for learners themselves, determining what, how, when and with what purpose they learn, whether it is formalised or not, have highly significant consequences for their self identity, work experiences and career prospects. Perhaps the most significant benefits for individuals from work-based learning are the reconciliation of knowledge formation and confidence in action.

Learners from College Aristotle displayed metacognition skills when they reflected and directed their own thinking. This became clear when they commented on the shift from focussing on the workplace as a major blame area to reflecting upon their actions and thoughts as practitioners and attempting to change some of their practices. They displayed deep learning; the development of critical thinking skills and in this instance, the learners became central in the teaching/learning interaction (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Biggs, 1999; Entwistle, 2000; Marton et al. 1997; Marton and Saljo, 1976; Prosser and Trigwell, 1998). The communication with peers resulted in re-examining of practices, testing old hypotheses and ‘modifying solutions previously entertained’ (Dewey, 1941/1991, in Burke, 1994:181-182).

Garside (1996:215) has commented that:

critical thinking involves a set of skills that are most effectively taught within the context of a subject area since it is impossible to think critically about something of which one knows nothing, critical thinking is dependent on a sufficient base of knowledge.

Learners were able to utilize their knowledge to make links, arrive at conclusions and bring together a number of strands to formulate an opinion or arrive at an understanding of a subject. This learning process was what van Merriënboer et al. (2003:5) observe is the

integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes; the coordination of qualitatively different constituent skills; and the transfer of what is learnt to work settings.

In this study it appears that the learners became producers of their own development (Bernstein 1983; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

This process of understanding can lead to the learner think of and initiate new practices which might lead to 'conflict between continuity and displacement' (Lave and Wenger, 2002:123) as they attempt to become part of the community whilst also trying to change some practices. This change can be accommodated if the practice is continuously seeking to adapt and change, although Lave and Wenger's theory (1991) does not offer an explanation of this accommodation and is a weakness in their theory. Their theory focuses on communities working together but does not explore the freedom given to individuals in initiating change. It is apparent in this study that the 'knowledge capital' which learners were accumulating was not being fully utilised by employers because of non-explicit agendas and resistance to change from other employees.

Although the learners were legitimate practitioners in their organizations their lack of leverage and authority limited their ability to initiate change at an organisational level. Lave and Wenger (1991:42) acknowledge that: 'members have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold diverse viewpoints', and they recognise that 'unequal relations of power must be included more systematically in our studies.' This is one shortcoming of Lave and Wenger's theory as it does not fully explore power relations within organizational structures or the negative implications for practitioners and the services. Learners were unable to utilize their learning because of their lack of leverage in the organization. Although their conversations and discussions created a space for

interweaving of viewpoints, for the incorporation of multiple perspectives, and for borrowing or bricolage, where borrowing seems useful (Lincoln and Guba, 2003:264).

However, none of the positive effects of these conversations were cascaded to the decision makers. Growing confidence appears to have led to increased levels of motivation in the learners and their class discussions and reflections enabled them to 'value their own contributions and achievements,' (Whitaker, 1995: 122) and prompted some to actively change their behaviour. Learners were exhibiting the positive effects of motivation both to themselves and their employers (Edward and Morris, 1996; Guest, 1984; Huberman, 1993; Maslow, 1970; Nias, 1981; Robertson et al. 1992; Vroom and Jago, 1988).

Through engaging with other learners on the course, learners were able to build their social capital in terms of building social relations, networks and contacts (Bourdieu, 1983, 1984, 1990,1993, 1977, 1977a, 1977c,) and further research on the effects of engaging in social capital might reveal some interesting findings. The formation of the networks allowed the learners to be part of a community (Lave and Wenger, 1991) from which they appeared to benefit and this investment in social capital enabled learners to access support and expertise. Learners, through WBL, gained access to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977c) which came in three forms: objectified, embodied and institutionalised (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Grenfell et al. 1998). Each of these forms served as:

instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed (Bourdieu, 1977c).

In this case, the objectified form was manifested in the qualifications they would ultimately gain, the embodied form took shape in the learning, 'education' and the conversations they were now a part of, and the institutionalised form was the HEIs they were attending. Symbolic capital took the form of status as some learners perceived that their opinions began to be valued by others.

5.2.4 Theme 3: Learners perceptions of employer attitudes

Learners commented that their employers displayed differing attitudes with regards to working on their work based assignments at work which led to undue anxiety amongst a number of learners. Some learners were not given adequate time to conduct their observations and as a result they needed to be conducted during lunch breaks or fitted in between other tasks. This was particularly difficult as:

Every time I started to write somebody interrupted me – oh! It was so frustrating. Sometimes it was difficult to think only about the observation; I just had so many things to do (B4).

5.2.5 Discussion

Learners have spoken about the problems encountered in conducting observations in their workplace. For example, one learner used her lunch breaks to observe children. It would seem that carrying out observations during lunch breaks defeats the objective of WBL. WBL implies learning at work and adequate time for effective observations needs to be allocated to its implementation. Observations could/should have been embedded into daily routines. It is apparent that one employer did not have sufficient information or understanding of the requirements of WBL on the Foundation degree programme and as a result, the learner found herself 'between a rock and a hard place'. The experience of the learner contradicts Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of peripheral participation and the manner in which participation in the life of the community helps in arriving at an understanding of the work. The learner, through the observations, was able to develop her knowledge and explore issues. However, the fact that the learner had to conduct the observations in her breaks poses questions about the validity of the learning process. Similar views were echoed by another learner who stated that she did not have sufficient time to observe children as she was constantly interrupted. This statement again contradicts Lave and Wenger's (ibid) theory as the tone and culture of the environment impacts on learning and participation and it is obvious that learners in this study were not able to extend their learning as their obligations to the workplace were not conducive to learning. Although they were part of a community they were unable to further their participation as they

did not have access to the appropriate context which would develop and facilitate learning.

The experience of the learners in this study highlights the role and priorities of an organization. Is the organization a place for learning or increasing productivity? Some critics argue that the two are inter-related (Cohen and Prusak, 2001; Edvinsson and Malone, 1997; Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) but how does the employer decide which is more important as some organizations do not have the budgets to train staff or indeed give staff time off to train? As mentioned in the literature review most SMEs do not have sufficient training funds for staff and focus on maintaining their productivity and the transition of role of the employee as a learner can be difficult. Clearly, more research is needed to investigate this issue.

Learners from College Aristotle experienced different attitudes from their employers in comparison with learners from College Cervantes. Employers of learners from College Aristotle appeared to be sympathetic towards the demands of the course and ensured that they had sufficient time to conduct the observations whereas learners from College Cervantes commented that their employers whilst understanding the need to conduct observations, were not willing to give time to conduct observations and there was a distinct impression that the employers were getting 'fed up' with the observations. The attitude of employers influences employees' learning at the workplace and justifiably, employees are unwilling to incur the displeasure of their employers as this might impact on how secure they feel and create a feeling that they are at risk of losing their job. The experience of learners from two colleges indicated that employers were not 'on board' in accommodating the demands of WBL which placed the learners in difficult positions.

5.2.6 Theme 4: Pastoral care

The main thread in this theme emphasises that pastoral care is instrumental in facilitating changes in learners who encompass a wide spectrum of experiences and it can be seen as a positive attempt to encourage learners to make constructive changes in their careers. Learners have observed that pastoral care is a bridge which connects academic study on the one hand and other factors which impact on success

in HE such as family life, perceptions of family members of HE and past experiences of and in education on the other.

5.2.7 Learners views of pastoral care

Pastoral care appears to play a part in building self-confidence and self esteem for learners (Barefoot, 2004; Christie et al. 2004; Yorke, 2004). Some of the learners who came to the course had to overcome many hurdles in order to attend.

The thought of going to Uni! No one in my family had ever gone and I felt scared just thinking about it! (C9)

12 out of the 28 learners felt that their roles as mothers and wives were established and any adjustments to that role created tensions in their families. Sometimes family members did not understand the amount of time needed to complete assignments as it was not in their experience. No one had previously carried out study that required time 'like this at home'. (B8)

Others noted that tensions with partners surfaced and one learner said that returning to HE had huge implications for her family as it created tensions between her partner who had left school with minimal qualifications and felt threatened. She was perceived to be 'different' and moving on to areas that were not accessible to him due to lack of knowledge and familiarity with HE. She felt it important to talk about these matters with her course tutor because they had a direct relation to her performance. The quote by the learner examines the roles and responsibilities of the course tutor. Tutors are able to help with course related work but are perhaps not qualified to give advice on matters which are personal.

It was my time with my tutor - my assignments were not a problem. I did have other issues in my personal life which were bothering me and I just valued the time to be able to talk to someone. I also felt that my tutor was non-judgemental and I could talk in confidence. (A3)

Others mentioned negative attitudes projected towards them from past educational settings. One student remarked:

My memories of school are definitely not happy ones, this is why I am enjoying the opportunity to study now and am grateful for the support I get from the tutors and the group. (A4)

Seven out of 19 learners from all three colleges commented on how they were made to feel 'worthless' at school and how this has had an effect on all subsequent educational decisions.

I just felt that I was a slow learner and not able to do any high level course. (C11)

One learner stated that the teachers' opinions of her had nothing to do with her academic abilities:

they were just making a judgement because I came from a 'non-traditional' family background. (C9)

She was of the opinion that she was being penalised for something over which she had no control. Other learners mentioned similar experiences and one student said that her teachers

could not understand my background and culture so I was asked to go for vocational courses, in my case childcare, in spite of the fact that I was competent at Maths.(B10)

There were learners (C5, C3 and B8) who, whilst acknowledging that their course tutor was supportive, did not need the tutorial sessions. As one student said:

I knew that I had to complete the course. Of course I had problems but they had to be solved by me. Talking to someone would have made me feel better but the problem would still have remained; I just had to get on with things. (C3)

Two out of six learners from College Balzac felt able to manage with minimal support from the course tutor. Three learners from College Balzac mentioned that they did not need the support provided from the tutorials to 'stay on' the course as they were aware of the limitations of tutor support. One learner said:

It was not that the tutor was not nice but you know, I had made the decision to come onto the course and I was determined to complete it. Before I came I had already decided how I was going to sort things out and this helped me because it wasn't such a big shock. Also, you know, in my life and in my work I know to have support is fine but sometimes you have to do the work without support and you have to find the support yourself from within yourself. (B1)

5.2.8 Discussion

In focussing on the research question: What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree? It appears that some learners on the Foundation degree programme strongly felt that HE was not part of their 'habitus' and in some instances there was no one in their social field who had gone to university. One learner described it as being 'an alien world'. Her statement reflects the different values placed on education by different cultural groups. The learner talked of her fear of going to university and it is apparent that her experience of HE was totally outside the realm of her 'habitus'. Most people replicate the 'habitus' with which they are most familiar and one that is comfortable to them. Consequently, the fear of this learner is understandable given that she was leaping into unknown territory. This unknown journey resulted in conflict with members of her family who were unable to identify and accommodate the changing 'habitus'. Other learners mentioned similar problems they faced such as tensions with partners and the inability of family members appreciating the time required to complete assignments as a consequence of studying in HE. One learner commented that she was viewed as being 'different' by her partner as she was moving out of the circle of their established 'habitus' and that created pressure on their relationship. She went on to say that the supportive and non-judgemental nature of the pastoral tutor in understanding her personal circumstance and creating a valid space for these conversations had been useful. Bourdieu (1977a) and Burr (2003) discuss how social class factors are powerful in guiding mediated thought and action (in this case taking the decision to go to university to improve career chances) as social class

is a powerful determinant in affecting lifestyle choices, including education. Although this study did not focus on social class, for some, HE was a new field to conquer. Dostoevsky (1869) touches on the theme of 'habitus', albeit in different terms, when he talks about the difficulties people face in attempting to change their social and economical circumstances. Bourdieu (1977) also uses another metaphor: that of game playing. In this context the players are unaware of the game they are playing. It is almost as if they are robots performing programmed repetitive moves.

Learners were able to talk about the invisible and not so invisible forces which had an effect on them. This included their perception of teachers' attitudes at school, general school experiences, social and family backgrounds and the personal and professional barriers they faced in their work. Learners were vocal about the experiences in schools which made them feel 'worthless' and how this affected their subsequent decisions. One learner poignantly recalled how she was marginalised because she came from a non-traditional background and was penalised for something over which that she had no control. So, whilst she perceived herself to be in the field 'playing the game' she had no control of the game as the outcome had already been decided for her. Similarly, another learner recalled the attitude taken by her teachers in pushing her towards vocational courses 'in spite of the fact that I was competent at Maths.'(B10, pg 87, line 12) It appears that the teachers had made up her mind for her in situating this learner's 'habitus' and restricted the opportunity for her to move outside it in spite of evidence which indicated that she could study at a higher academic level. This experience indicates the power that tutors and teachers have and how they can influence life choices and chances of their learners; it is almost as though they are controlling the 'game' and the players (learners) do not have opportunities to make their own game. In this instance, the learner was attempting to change her symbolic and cultural 'habitus.' In reality, there are not many learners who are able to articulate and act upon incidents such as these. The above examples indicate that learners had begun to understand the games they were playing in relation to their 'habitus', social and cultural expectations and other codes.

Some learners, through pastoral support, began to articulate the different forms of what Bourdieu (1977) terms as the capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) the Foundation degree was offering them. For some learners, lack of economic capital

had prevented them from studying further. The Recruitment Incentive Element of the Transformation Fund and the Graduate Leader Fund will enable more practitioners from a wide spectrum of 'habitus' to access training and HE and change their capital. The pastoral care system could be compared to what Bourdieu (1977) calls a 'market' which captures the many different exchanges taking place in the field of pastoral care sessions.

An important aspect of this study was that, although most learners benefited from the pastoral care, there were some who were aware of the 'game' they were playing and commented that they knew exactly how to achieve their goals without the need of pastoral support. These learners were playing what Giddens (1991:2) terms '*practical consciousness*' meaning that people often have:

a pre-perceptive anticipations, a sort of practical induction (to the future) based upon previous experience...having a feel for the game is having the game under the skin (Bourdieu, 1997:30).

This would seem to support Wenger's (1998, 2000, 2007) notion that a community of practice is the result of the history of previous learning and that one of the main focuses of learning in a community is to fully belong. This need to belong can be interpreted as 'having the game under the skin'. It is also possible to hypothesise that mature learners are more aware of the 'game' and understand how they need to 'play' in order to be successful. These learners appear:

not to be troubled by the responsibility given to them for their own learning and task completion (Rhodes et al. 2002:139).

5.2.9 Theme 5: Study Skills

Learners from all three colleges were of the opinion that study skills sessions had been beneficial. Most learners observed that the study skills 'menu' was varied and enabled them to improve their academic writing skills.

Eleven learners mentioned that the sessions had enabled them to improve their grades as they had been able to focus on aspects such as structure, analysis and presentation skills.

I knew what I had to write it just helped knowing how to write it and how to present it. (A4)

Three learners commented that they did not find the sessions helpful because they did not directly relate to their modules.

I know they are meant to give you an understanding of how to write but I would have found it useful if I could see it from my own subject viewpoint (C9)

and

It helped me understand how to write in a 'proper' way and the little hints they gave me were very useful. (C3)

Another student echoed the same sentiments and her feeling was that:

Learners who were second language speakers were helped a great deal by these sessions. I think in another language and this shows in my writing and it does not sound proper you know! (B2)

The learners observed that these sessions gave them a good grounding on aspects such as the nuances of academic writing, presenting and substantiating their arguments. As a result, they were able to cope with their workload.

5.2.10 Discussion

It appears that most learners thought that study skills sessions were helpful in enabling them to understand the conventions of academic writing and discourse as some learners had no experience of writing and presenting information and knowledge in a prescribed manner. Some learners stated that they struggled with the presentation of the subject matter. One learner has aptly described this as, 'writing in a proper way,' and commented that the help proved to be useful in improving her writing skills. The development of writing skills enabled some learners to improve their grades and carry these skills into their third year at university. Research by Tait and Godfrey (2001:264) suggests that:

good preparation for studying in HE is a major contributor to effective independent studying and is therefore key ingredient of a good student experience.

Research carried out by (Burns and Sinfield, 2004; Knight et al. 2006; Russell, 2009) has also confirmed the claims of the learners, especially for those learners without recent formal experience of learning in areas such as structuring essays, referencing documents and using appropriate academic language.

In this research it is apparent that learners in their assignments needed to engage in

two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987:12).

This means that, whilst they were developing knowledge of the early years, they also had to translate the acquired knowledge into academic text which involved describing and analysing knowledge and therefore develop:

the ability to transform information...to meet rhetorically constrained purposes (Grabe and Kaplan 1996:116).

And as Kutz et al. (1993:30) remark

The nature of academic writing confuses and disorients learners, particularly those who bring with them a set of conventions that are at odds with those of the academic world they are entering.

This is an important point to consider as learners bring their social, cultural and linguistic 'habitus' in their writing. This is particularly evident in the case of a learner who remarked that she thought in another language and her written work displayed the nuances of translating from another language. Translating brings the peculiarities of the first language into the writing and this is apparent in the structure of the sentence, the manner in which arguments are constructed and sometimes betrays evidence of 'cultural ways of thinking'. Additionally, some languages do not have literal translations of words or even an approximate meaning and some learners struggle with constructing sentences and arguments as this is not accommodated within their

linguistic and sometimes cultural history. Swale (1990:4) comments that understanding the social dimension that learners bring to their writing is important as:

it is not an individually-oriented, inner directed cognitive process, but as much as an acquired response to the discourse conventions...within particular communities.

Some learners in this study were faced with two different social situations simultaneously; one entering HE and the other understanding social academic conventions. Flower et al. (1990) state that teachers will need to understand the transitions that learners need to undergo. They can be guided by making available opportunities to practice interpreting texts in order to build 'readerly' sensitivity (Kern, 2000) and combine development and practice of language and content knowledge (Wells, 2000).

There are now more learners entering HE without the requisite study skill techniques and HEIs will need to review the offer of these sessions. One of the aims of the Foundation degree was to increase and support widening participation (Doyle, 2003) and Tony Blair (1999) in his Romanes lecture introduced Foundation degrees as being aimed at the 'middle third of achievers' whose opportunities for progression to HE were restricted. In order to ensure that all learners have a reasonable chance to progress it is important to consider the structure and delivery of study skills.

In investigating the research question: What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree? The data are clear in demonstrating student opinion that too many modules are assessed by essays, that too many essays rely on observation and that conducting these observations were sometimes problematic. Moreover, the observations themselves were not really assessed: this seems to have missed an important professional development. For example, a simple two column sheet would allow an observation to be recorded on the left hand column, with the student providing an interpretation of inference in the left hand column leading to the observations being assessed in their own right.

There were positive outcomes on WBL assessments as well as they developed thinking and self reflective skills which enabled them to understand the various forces

at work such as power play and hidden agendas. The learners' views of pastoral care suggest that pastoral care played an important part in adjusting to a higher level course of study for some learners. However, not all learners needed high levels of support supporting the view that although some support is necessary, most adult learners make informed judgements about their choices and therefore require far less support.

With regards to study skills, the data emphasises the importance of these sessions for non-traditional learners enabling them to understand and practise conventions of academic writing.

RQ 2: What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL?

5.3. Theme 1: Employers views on issues/ problems with WBL assessments

WBL assessments were highlighted by employers as needing a more clearly defined structure in terms of both design and delivery to ensure the success of Foundation degrees. None of the employers interviewed in this study had been involved in designing or giving their opinions on the assessment structure. Some employers could not accommodate the requirements of the assessments and this led to tensions between the employee and the employer. Employers were unaware that Foundation degrees were designed to meet the needs of the employers and that employers had an input into the delivery and assessment of the course until they were exposed to the publicity material.

How could I assess I don't have time to mark. (Emp.1)

I am not a teacher also I cannot spend so much time on just one member of staff! (Emp.2)

Two employers (Emp. 1, Emp. 4) voiced their concerns with work-based assessments. One of the employers identified that her setting lacked the range of children needed for observations and that this led to undue anxiety for her staff who was required to carry out observations in other settings. She felt she could not allow the member of staff to have 'time off' as this might be seen as being partial.

My staff had to arrange observations with another provider in her own time – she ended up taking two days of her annual leave and even after that she found that this other nursery were not willing to give her all the information saying that it was confidential. (Emp. 1)

One employer commented that she was completely unaware of the range of assessments with a work-based element.

Had I been made aware before the start of the course I would have been able to think about the assessments and plan something out. In this case, I was taken by surprise about every assessment. (Emp. 3)

Two employers (Emp.4, Emp. 3) commented that there was not sufficient communication between the colleges, either about the course or the specifics of work-based assessments.

Before the course started representatives from the college should have come personally and given a breakdown on things like how the learners were going to be assessed. If I had an idea of what the assessment was I might have been able to help her more. (Emp. 4)

In addition three employers (Emp. 3, Emp. 4 and Emp. 5) commented that they had not received sufficient information about Foundation degrees and would have liked to receive additional information that gave a detailed account of the course, number of modules, the skills and abilities that their employee would acquire and the changes they would need to make in the workplace to accommodate the student and ensure their successful completion of the course. After all:

I need to know what the course is about before saying yes, and, since it was a two year course which would require substantial planning to cover the staff member, detailed information would have aided my decision making process. (Emp. 2)

5.3.1 Discussion

Although the number of employers in this study is small, it is apparent that employers were faced with a range of issues regarding observations as part of the programme. One important issue focussed on was the lack of information and guidance from the FECs or HEIs. Employers remarked that they were not made aware of the demands of the course and could not therefore prepare a schedule which would allow the learners' time to meet the coursework demands. As a result, problems were not pre-empted and resulted in learners facing difficulties in conducting observations and employers

not being able to help in overcoming them. In this study, learners appeared to be experiencing the brunt of their employers' dissatisfaction with the course and they felt unable to complain to or approach either tutors or the HEI.

It is evident that there was a lack of collaborative partnership arrangements and sufficient thought had not been given to the many factors which affect learners undertaking WBL assignments. Moreover, no conferring with employers appears to have taken place on the assessment structures which would be compatible with the requirements of the employers. Productive working relationships require trust between all parties (Boud and Solomon, 2001; Dear and Lonsdale, 2006; Gittus and Hemsworth, 2006; Kumar, 2007; Milbourne et al. 2003; Morgan and Hughes, 1999; Pilkington, 2004) and cultural and historical factors affect the development of these relationships (Bottery, 2003). Research by Green (2006:30) on the perceived benefits of WBL to employers found that the employers' perceptions of their roles varied considerably and supporting the findings of this study, employers commented that they had received insufficient information regarding guidance from course staff, supervising or giving feedback. In some cases, the first time the employer had received any communication from the college was 'when the college was asked to seek volunteer organisations to respond to the researcher' (ibid).

Fraser (2006:6) points out that employers and HEIs need to:

share the discourse of their own communities, each coming to recognise the ambiguities of their own taken for granted assumptions, values and understandings, thereby creating a new common language of the curriculum as well as a sense of shared purpose

whilst Franciszka (2008:2) comments that:

this new form of Assessment and Evaluation embodies a paradoxical, systemic form of creative tension – it represents change, learning, knowledge and transformation as the contextual outcome of a 'working alliance' – a 'partnership' between persons as active subjects, organisations as goal oriented objects, and the university as systemically-contextualised.

Symes et al. (2000) refer to WBL as 'transdiscipline' as it focuses on the practical application of learning and this in turn has:

profound ramifications for the accreditation of learning in the university, for they fly in the face of conventional pedagogy (570).

One employer remarked that the employee struggled with the observation element of the assessment as they did not have access to a range of children with differing needs. This statement reflects on the inadequacy of the assessment method and highlights the issues relating to WBL and assessments. Employers were of the opinion that prior information on course content and assessment techniques would aid them, not only in grasping the requirements of the course, but also assisting the employee in managing a work plan. Employers were unanimous in stating that they were not involved in any discussion or negotiation on content, delivery or assessment methods of the Foundation degree and were surprised on hearing that this course was aimed at meeting the needs of the employers. The *First Report in series of Early Years Foundation degree evaluation* (Mowlam et al. 2003) drew attention to the problems faced by employers in trying to understand and effectively put into practice WBL and stated that further clarification is necessary in order to achieve consistency of approach. It is clear that in this study, employers were confused about virtually all aspects of the qualification and felt unprepared to support their employees and make informed decisions because of an absence of relevant literature and guidance.

The findings of this research indicate that employers are not fully engaged with WBL and research done by Hillier et al. (2004) suggests that there is a polarization of perceptions from the employers and employees standpoints. The perceptions of employers indicated that they would be involved with WBL only if time, adequate information and favourable circumstances permitted. This view was corroborated by employees who suggested that there was an unevenness of practice in organizations. Examples included some employees who were given time off whilst others struggled to make up the time.

Employers have pointed out that they would hesitate to take on assessment responsibilities as it would deflect them from their day to day work, would be time consuming and a disproportionate amount of time and resources would be concentrated on supporting just one or two employees undertaking the Foundation

degree programme. Furthermore, only organizations with substantial budgets and a defined training programme would be able to afford this level of activity. As some employers have mentioned, being short of resources, funds and staff they would have preferred information which would have guided their decisions relating to training.

Employers are hesitant in agreeing to mark assessments as this would require development of new skills and detailed understanding of the subject. They expressed having no experience or expertise in marking essays and did not see it as part of their remit. Foundation degrees were marketed as a solution to employers' need for highly skilled workforce at a 'technician level' and Bill Rammell, (2005) the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education has remarked that the relationship between employers and HE is fundamental to the success of the knowledge based economy. This study has demonstrated that employers were not informed about the new qualification and contrary to government objectives, employer engagement was not viewed as pivotal to the success of Foundation degrees.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Employers views of increased improvements in practice

Employers observed the development in their staff with regard to increased confidence which in turn led to improved practices and approaches within the setting.

Two employers (E1, E2) were clearly impressed with the progress of their staff since starting the Foundation degree. One employer commented on 'how she grew and developed in confidence.' (Emp. 1) He continued by saying that the confidence was demonstrated in the manner in which she approached her work with children. Previously, she would not challenge other staff, but now she was confident in voicing her opinions. Other staff members were also surprised as they had always known her to be a quiet person and since starting the course she '*had found her voice*'. He further commented that she was now voicing new ideas when planning activities – she was multilingual and it was noticeable that discussions in class and additional reading had made her think about ways of promoting children's well being. One example he gave was how she regularly conducted singing sessions with the children where she sang songs in Turkish, including nursery rhymes, to the obvious enjoyment of the children. Other staff members have asked her to teach some words in Turkish in order to communicate and build relationships with the children.

Another employer (Emp. 2) commented that in her member of staff there was a noticeable increase in discussing issues relating to children and she appeared to develop an awareness of the issues that impact on children and the constraints that early years providers are faced with on a daily basis including budgets, staff shortages and lack of professional input in the case of children with special needs. Both employers (Emp. 1, Emp. 2) stated that they were impressed with the changes they had witnessed in their staff and mentioned the positive benefits to the workplace and the children:

I can see the difference and the difference it has made to the children. (Emp.1)

5.3.3 Discussion

It is evident from this study that WBL enabled some learners to increase their participation in their workplace. It appears that employers in this study were able to provide evidence of positive behavioural changes in their employees and were of the opinion that these changes had a positive impact on the organization, on the children and raised confidence levels of the employees. It is obvious that the participation in college became a 'process of changing, understanding in practice that is learning' (Lave, 1993:6).

One employer commented that her employee was voicing her opinions and challenging practices in the workplace and as a result became an active participant in the workplace. Dewey (1916/1944: 338) has underlined the importance of participation in connecting the learner to the workplace and stated that:

if the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs, then knowledge is a mode of participation.

Learners were able to utilize their knowledge in the workplace and the intellectual capital they were accumulating was paying dividends at work as it benefitted the organization. For the employer, developing the intellectual capital of the employees resulted in capacity building and improved services (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997; Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

The learners, as a result of entering the 'field' of the Foundation degree programme, were able to initiate changes in the workplace (Jenkins, 1992). This is apparent in the case one learner who was able to use her language skills to teach children nursery rhymes in Turkish. Ideally, workplace learning should be an ongoing process for early years workers so that a 'community' of practitioners can share a common repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary and styles) that members have developed over time (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 1998). Fullan (2001:14) contends that:

organisations can transform when they can establish mechanisms for learning in the dailyness of organisational life.

This is apparent in one employer's comment that her employee was displaying greater awareness of the work and the factors that impact on the day to day running of the organization. Eraut (2000) remarks that when individuals start the process of becoming self aware they begin to use their skills in a more effective and professional manner that allows for better performance in their jobs.

Employers in this study perceived that WBL on the Foundation degree programme encouraged the learners to make links between declarative and functional knowledge, to reflect and actively seek solutions. From the comments of the employers it appears that the learners were actively engaged in making meaning from information and experience and were monitoring, evaluating and restructuring their prior knowledge. The impact of this process is demonstrated by one employer commenting on the changes they had witnessed and perceived that the learner had '*found her voice.*' (E1, pg.99 line 24) This is a revealing choice of words by the employer. Finding your voice can be interpreted in numerous ways. What are the conditions that lead to voices being heard? For this particular learner, an increase in confidence through engagement and discussions with other practitioners led to turning up 'the volume on the inaudible voice' (Clough, 2002:67).

Individuals are natural learners and enjoy learning in the absence of feelings of insecurity and human behaviour is motivated by the need for self-development and self-determination (Kanter, 1977; Scandura, 1992). Employers have mentioned that

the WBL element has supported their employees in the questioning process, enabling them to reflect on their practice and participate

in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities (Lave and Wenger, 2002:115).

In this manner the learning becomes 'an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in-world' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:35).

5.3.4 Theme 3: Employers concerns regarding poaching of staff

Employers expressed their unease on the subject of training and then losing their staff to another organization. The worries revolved around the money spent on training which would not benefit the workplace.

Two employers (Emp. 4, Emp. 5) voiced their concerns about staff being poached. They felt that it was a possibility that after they had spent the money on training, staff would leave the organisation for improved job opportunities. One employer (Emp. 1) mentioned that one member of her staff left soon after being trained and the organisation accrued no benefit.

Two years is a lot of money for my organisation I need to be assured that all the hardship that I will have been through will pay off. (Emp. 4)

There needs to be some system where staff who do the Foundation degree do not leave us. Then we will be less frightened about the time and the money. (Emp.5)

The employers (Emp. 2, Emp. 3) in the voluntary sector observed that lack of help from the Government hindered them in sending staff for professional and personal development.

We are short of resources as it is – always struggling to find money always threatened with closure. (Emp. 4)

Other employers echoed these sentiments when they said that if the Government is serious about providing quality childcare they should do 'something about it' (Emp.1, Emp.2). The employers were of the opinion that the Government's policies did not translate into practice and that unless this was addressed, delivering quality childcare would be difficult.

5.3.5 Discussion

Some employers raised concerns regarding employees leaving after training or being 'poached' by other companies resulting in them not benefitting from the investment in training. If companies decide not to train their staff for fear of poaching, their collective actions would result in a substantially under skilled workforce the consequences of which would mean that it would be difficult to move out of the cycle of having under trained and de-skilled staff. This could result in not being able to compete in the present high skilled knowledge economy. *Foundation Degree Task Report to Ministers* (DfES, 2004) acknowledges these problems but highlights the benefits to other employers since sending their staff to study for Foundation degrees: these include reduced recruitment costs, improved retention of employees, filling 'the skills gap', developing skills of frontline staff and middle managers and improved motivation and performance. Whilst acknowledging the above mentioned benefits Lyall (2005) notes that employers remain uncertain about Foundation degrees and are reluctant to send their staff for training until Foundation degrees prove unequivocally relevant for their businesses.

A large number of SMEs view training not as investment but as a significant cost, partly as a result of lack of funds and staff. On the other hand research by Cully (2005) found that larger companies could not only afford to send their staff for training but also had leverage in determining the type of training their staff undertook and had availability of resources in terms of covering staff shortages compared to SMEs. Similarly, research by LSC (2004) found that size of a firm is a key factor in determining training activity. One employer stated that threat of closure prevented staff being trained and two other employers commented on the lack of help from the Government to train their staff. Another employer mentioned that the Government needs to demonstrate their commitment to training early years staff by actively translating policy into practice and making available funds for training for SMEs. The

above statements indicate that staff employers will not focus on training if they are faced with possible closure and one way of gaining employers' confidence would be through securing the future of the organization. This in turn would enable employers to focus on training their staff and 'buy into' the government's agenda of developing staff skills. The Government's *Skills Strategy Progress Report* in 2004 clearly stated that there was a need to improve the skills of the workforce and engagement with employers was one of the major five challenges (DfES, 2004: para 42). Also, the *Skills White Paper* in 2005 (DfES, 2005) again stressed the importance of employer engagement in order to upskill the workforce. Lack of trust between the government and employers is apparent and as Besley (2005) has cogently argued that the interventionist approach of the Government has led to the introduction of initiatives and strategies '*often without a common thread*' and this study appears to support the notion that employers are critical of the lack of governmental support in updating the skills of their staff.

In answering the Research Question: What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL? the data suggests that employers found themselves unable to make any certain judgement about the style, relevance, quantity or quality of the assessment tasks. In spite of this, employers did comment that their organizations had benefitted from the employee undertaking the course in terms of increased confidence and improving the services for the children although they expressed doubts around the potential of 'wasted' money spent on training if employees were later to be poached by another organization.

5.3.6 Summarising Chapter 5

This chapter has examined the following research questions:

- What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?
- What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL?

Employers faced a number of issues, specifically communication with the Colleges and engagement with the programme. This divide impeded the formation of partnerships and it appears that they were not able to talk the same language. In this way employers and the FECs were not able to clarify the ambiguities that existed within the framework of the qualification. Had this occurred it would have led to the formation of a 'new language' which would have had its own set of values and judgements but one which was shared by both parties. Nixon et al. (2006:8) identify the challenge as 'Overcoming cultural differences and language barriers to establish a shared strategic intent will require substantial time and effort on both sides'. In support Beaney (2005:40), comments that employers are at heart of this qualification in terms of both development and delivery however 'in design terms does not disguise the real difficulties which this engenders and the complex factors which influence engagement'. It is imperative that FDs are designed and delivered to meet the needs of the employers. Nixon et al. (2006) focus on building collaborative relationships and point out that networking is important as it allows individuals and institutions to build productive relationships.

It is possible that FECs were unsure and perhaps even unprepared of the demands of this qualification and therefore were not able build confident relationships with employers or answer their queries. Again it is possible that the FECs were not able to pre-empt some of the issues that could have arisen and did not have a strategy in place to solve these issues. Although not a focus of this research it would be interesting to examine how confident FECs were in delivering this new qualification.

The classroom practice would not have been difficult however working collaboratively with employers and making them integral and central to the success of the qualification would have posed challenges they perhaps had not anticipated.

Employers and learners spoke about the tensions of dual identities - learners and employees simultaneously in the workplace. The shift was difficult to maintain leading to tensions between employers and employees. Edwards and Usher (2000) point out that a WBL curriculum which is primarily designed by an educational institution but delivered in the workplace can blur boundaries as theory and practice are situated in the workplace although there may be variations between theory and practice. The challenge therefore is to try and minimise the conflicts and exigencies that occur through partnership arrangements, networking, and access to resources and expertise.

The three elements which appear to have facilitated learning and reflection were socialisation, articulation and internalisation. Socialisation, which involved meeting as a group, talking about their workplace practices and activities and indeed the variations in ethos in the workplace, enabled the learners to understand that there were myriad possibilities of approaching work. Importantly socialisation made possible the articulation 'without fear' of issues which they were unable to discuss or challenge at work. Constructivists may view this as an integral part of WBL as it leads to deeper levels of learning and Tuomi-Grohn and Englestrom (2003:4, cited in Painter, (2009) interestingly refer it to 'boundary crossing' and propose:

Crossing boundaries involve encountering difference, entering into territory in which we are unfamiliar and, to some significant extent therefore, unqualified. In the face of such obstacles, boundary crossing seems to require significant cognitive retooling.

This cognitive retooling led to the development of Mode 2 knowledge which some learners internalised and through this process reframed their tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 2007) and enabled them to reflect not only on their professional practice but also their own barriers to work which impacted on their professionalism. The opportunity for expansive learning and creation of 'pedagogic spaces' (Freire and Marcedo, 1999) provided on the Foundation degree programme, assisted the learners to conceptualise

their experiences taking into account their cultural capital. Expansive learning produced 'culturally new patterns of activity at work' (Engeström, 2001:139). Learners articulated an understanding of the sub text of their workplace which was not always positive but, they also spoke about how they developed their own sense of worth by changing the way they worked and the way they challenged existing practices.

In summary, the findings indicate that various factors enhance or impede WBL for both learners and employers. For WBL to be successful learners and employers need to develop strong partnerships as this will ensure the reputation of this new qualification and more important its longevity. In order for this to occur WBL has to take into account to the needs, size and the resources available to employers as in this manner WBL becomes meaningful for the employers and employees and results in a beneficial three way partnership. One way of achieving this is by re-evaluating the various components of the qualification and reworking it so as to make it flexible and workable for employers and employees and tutors. The research questions have highlighted the need to offer a variety of options of assessment which can fit in with the demands of the workplace and the importance of a strong infrastructure through pastoral support and study skills to raise the academic skill levels of the practitioners. Nevertheless, for the Government to achieve a successful outcome for this new vocational qualification it is imperative that monetary support to employers is vital.

The following chapter recommends the changes necessary in order to enhance professional practice for early years practitioners.

CHAPTER 6

6. Conclusion

6.1 WBL Assessments

This research set out to investigate the role that WBL had in the delivery and effectiveness of the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree. The research questions were:

- What is the experience of learners on an Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree?
- What are the views of employers of the potential of the new Foundation Degree programme which integrates theory and WBL?

As a new qualification the researcher was interested in the impact of WBL on practitioners and employers in the early years sector. This new qualification was marketed as one that would develop the skills of the workforce and enable widening participation through its curriculum content and delivery. For many years there was a perception that employers were not consulted in the design and delivery of programmes that would result in the development of a skilled workforce. They also felt that, although their new employees understood the theoretical aspect of their work, they lacked the necessary practical skills. This apparent gap resulted in employers focusing on perceived deficiencies in staff that impacted on the effectiveness and the sound delivery of early years services. The researcher sought to identify whether aspects such as pastoral care and study skills enabled learners to gain confidence in the workplace and develop skills which they previously might not have considered.

From this research it is evident that Foundation degrees have received a mixed response both from employers and learners. Employers for example, expressed the problems that they and their employees encountered in relation to the carrying out of observations. These difficulties have highlighted the challenge faced by universities and FECs in accommodating WBL assessment techniques and highlighted the need

to engage with employers. Employers were unaware of the focus on employer involvement in the design and delivery of Foundation degrees and discussed the lack of communication with FECs. Although the Government highlights the necessity for employers to be involved in the structure of Foundation degrees, employers in this research were unaware of potential employer engagement and voiced concerns regarding marking of assessments.

For learners, WBL aided reflection on their personal practice which led some learners to examine a variety of issues from newly found standpoints. The issues that they took into consideration were the economic, social and political aspects which in turn led to the development of problem solving skills. The study has shown that observations as an assessment technique pose difficulties for learners. Some of underlying issues have included a dearth of appropriate children to observe and limited access to Special Educational Needs and multilingual children. Furthermore, over-emphasis on observations which were not graded identified a tension and a need to revise assessment techniques on the EYSEFD. Lastly, this research highlighted the benefits of study skills for learners who did not have experience of HE.

CHAPTER 7

7. Recommendations

Table 7.1 highlights the themes and the recommendations arising from this study.

Table 7.1: Themes and Recommendations

Emerging Theme	Recommendation
Structure of assessment	Change structure by making it flexible through provision of alternate assessments for example presentations.
Information to employers	Detailed information about WBL assessments to be given to employers and employers' views sought and incorporated in assessments.
Training needs	Employers' views regarding specific training needs of their staff to be included in designing the curriculum.
Research	Research on benefits of employer engagement in WBL and WBL assessments.
Employer concerns	New regulations which inhibit staff leaving employment after training to be introduced.
Training of staff in SMEs	Funding for training to be made available and staff to payback funding in case they leave within two years of completing training.
Learners' views	Learners' views on WBL assessments sought and incorporated in curriculum delivery.
Pastoral care	Frequent staff development sessions on delivering effective pastoral care and sharing good practice.
Study Skills	Sessions to be offered prior to learners coming on the course which should also be an integral part of the curriculum delivery.

7.2 Contribution to knowledge

The findings in this investigation carried out between 2003 and 2006 have highlighted the poor quality of assessment in the three institutions delivering the EYSEFD programmes. The assessment over-emphasised one technique: essay writing over observation. It appeared that the educative role of observation was largely ignored, that assessment was more to do with essay writing and that other widely practised assessment techniques were ignored. One of the contributions of this study has been to highlight the weakness in assessment which is a fundamental aspect of learning and teaching.

Current literature seems overwhelmingly to support the notion that pastoral care of learners is essential for achievement and student retention. This research seems to offer contrary findings in that, although learners viewed pastoral care as a positive aspect of their overall experience, there was no evidence to support that this had a positive effect on achievement and retention. Furthermore, it could be argued that this research indicates that learners who 'commit' to the course are aware of the pressures and adopt a solution focused approach.

The research has also highlighted the manner in which WBL on the Foundation degrees encourages development of critical thinking skills of learners. Learners developed skills such as examining their own practice and the multitude of factors which help or hinder it. They felt able to understand and articulate problems and attempt to find possible solutions to both personal and practical issues. Furthermore, WBL appears to have enhanced an understanding of their personal history, social origins and a re-examination of personal attitudes and beliefs. Learners increased awareness of institutional ethos indicates a greater understanding of power structures, the limitations of their role to influence policy and also to develop a greater perception of the steps they might take to promote change.

Finally, the study contributes through giving a voice to the two fundamental stakeholders of the Foundation degree, namely learners and employers in their effort to embed WBL in the 'dailyness' of their practice.

7.3 Contribution to Professional Practice

This study singles out three groups: government, employers and learners for further comment.

7.3.1 Government Policy

It is not sufficient for the Government to say that employers are key players in the success of this new qualification. The Government needs to acknowledge the input of the employers through providing additional funding, especially for SMEs and perhaps through providing subsidies to those who send staff on Foundation degree programmes. Employer involvement should be led by a Government department that underlines a strategy which can then be followed by HEIs and FECs. This would ensure consistency of approach and acknowledgement of the importance of employer engagement.

The Government also needs to provide additional funding to FECs to develop Foundation degrees and employ link persons who will focus on employer involvement and liaise between HEIs and FECs. This would ensure that staff are not over-stretched and can focus on the provision of the curriculum of Foundation degrees. The funding could be used for posts that focus on employer involvement and in building sustainable links with HEIs.

7.3.2 Employers

It seems clear that employers need to be involved in all aspects of the design and delivery of Foundation degrees. At a policy level, employers should be consulted on the Foundation degrees that need to be launched following consultations on the gaps in the economy together with the necessary theoretical and practical aspects. This information should form the basis for the curriculum framework for FECs. Employers should also be consulted on practical aspects such as the mode of delivery which could include a mix of distance learning and classroom contact. It would also benefit the smooth running of the programmes if employers were included in discussions on the most convenient times to deliver the curriculum. This might ensure minimal disruption to the daily running of businesses; employers might be more willing to send

staff on programmes as they would be able to accommodate the training needs of their employees as well as ensuring smooth running of the organisation.

There is also a possibility that if employers looked positively at the benefits of programmes for their organisations then they might also be more inclined to be involved in both the teaching and learning of assessments. For example, employers might suggest ways in which an assessment could be incorporated into their normal routine and see the benefits of assessing in-house. This could lead not only to the sharing of assessments, but also their refinement in that it might lead to a closer match with the objectives of the organisation. If this were to take place it could develop a culture whereby employers might deliver sessions in colleges on linking the practical aspects whilst underpinning them with theory.

7.3.3 Learners

Foundation degrees with their WBL appear to have impacted on learners in a variety of ways. One of the most striking aspects appears to be the understanding of cultural capital which they inhabited and using the medium of Foundation degree to redefine their cultural capital in a manner which benefits them.

7.4 Further Research

If the researcher were to carry out further research it might focus on the acquisition of skills on the Foundation degree programme. Skills could be divided into three strands. Each exploration of the skills would form a separate research project.

The first strand would relate to improving skills in order to profit the organizations. In the early years context, this would focus on increasing the provision as a result of significant rises in the demand for children's places and achieving positive inspection reports. The research methodology would consist of conducting a skills audit prior to entering the Foundation Degree programme and an exit audit on completion. The success of the impact on the organization could be traced over the period of the employee participating on the Foundation degree programme. Qualitative and quantitative methods could usefully be employed in this research.

The second strand would focus on differentiating generic and specific skills that employers felt important to their organization. Current literature supports the notion

that most employers feel that their employees lack sufficient generic skills such as working in teams. The research question could be framed to investigate this notion. A table of generic and specialist skills required by the employers would be formulated. Employers could be asked to identify and grade which skills they feel are most important to their organization. Similarly, employees could also be asked to identify what they consider important skills for the organization, grade those skills they have acquired and the skills that they would need to develop on a Foundation degree course. A comparison made of the employers and employees' perceptions at the end of the course would enable the research question to be addressed. Both qualitative and quantitative methods could usefully be employed in gathering data.

The third strand could focus on the relationship between motivation and skills acquisition. This would examine to what extent the Foundation degree has increased the motivation of learners and the resultant impact on further development of skills. The research would involve participants keeping diaries over a period of several months with three open ended interviews at the commencement of the course, halfway into the programme and at the end of the course. The research would try to determine how self motivation could enhance the personal and professional development of learners.

It might be interesting to investigate what might be the benefits (or not) of changing cultural capital. This would need to be a long term study, involving research at various stages of participants' careers to gather data on themes such as career development and fundamental changes in thinking, attitudes and beliefs. Research could involve open ended interviews informed by participants' personal journals. Yet another idea could be to investigate the investment participants place in continuing with professional development as a result of their involvement with the Foundation degree programme.

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APPENDIX 1

Questions to and Responses from Learners.

Aristotle

Gender	
Male	0
Female	4
Date of birth	
1959 -1960	3
1961 - 1970	0
1971-1980	0
1981 - 1990	1
Ethnicity	
Black African	1
Black Caribbean	1
British	1
Irish	1

Question	1	2	3	4	N/A
1. I feel I am on the right course	2	2	0	0	0
2. My teachers are subject specialists and can integrate theory and practice.	3	1	0	0	0
3. The course helps me match theory to practice	3	0	1	0	0
4. WBL is an effective way to learn	4	0	0	0	0
5. Study skills sessions are very helpful	2	2	0	0	0
6. My tutorial sessions allow me to discuss a range of issues.	1	3	0	0	0
7. My tutor is very supportive	2	2	0	0	0

Balzac

Gender	
Male	0
Female	15
Date of Birth	
1950 - 59	3
1960 - 69	4
1970 - 79	6
1980 - 89	1
No date given	1
Ethnicity	
Asian	4
British	9
Pakistani	2

Question	1	2	3	4	N/A	Don't Know
1. feel I am on the right course	3	12	0	0	0	0
2. My teachers are subject specialists and can integrate theory and practice.	2	11	2	0	0	0
3. The course helps me match theory to practice	3	5	2	0	5	0
4. WBL is an effective way to learn	5	8	2	0	0	0
5. Study skills sessions are very helpful	5	10	0	0	0	0
6. My tutorial sessions allow me to discuss a range of issues.	1	9	5	0	0	0
7. My tutor is very supportive	0	9	5	0	0	0

Cervantes

Gender	
Male	1
Female	17
Date of Birth	
1950 - 59	1
1960 - 69	5
1970 - 79	4
1980 - 89	4
No date given	4
Ethnicity	
British	3
Black African	2
Black Caribbean	7
Greek	1
French	1
Irish	1
Other	2

Question	1	2	3	4	N/A	Don't Know
1. feel I am on the right course	5	11	2	0	0	0
2. My teachers are subject specialists and can integrate theory and practice.	7	6	5	0	0	0
3. The course helps me match theory to practice	8	8	2	0	0	0
4. WBL is an effective way to learn	9	9	0	0	0	0
5. Study skills sessions are very helpful	8	9	1	0	0	0
6. My tutorial sessions allow me to discuss a range of issues.	13	5	0	0	0	0
7. My tutor is very supportive	10	5	2	0	0	1

APPENDIX 2

Questions to and Responses from Employers

	1	2	3	4	NA	NO REPLY
1 My staff have benefited from the WBL element of the course	3	2	0	0	0	0
2 Work based assessments were integrated into workplace practice.		3	1	1	0	
3 My staff have gained new skills due to the WBL element						
4 My staff have improved their practice as a result of WBL	2	3	0	0	0	
5 My staff have improved existing resources as a result of WBL	3	1				1
6 My staff have introduced new methods of working	2	2	1			
7 My staff have developed new resources	2	2	1			
8 My staff appear to be motivated	3	1	1			
9 My staff are able to turn theory into practice	3	2				

APPENDIX 3

Interview Questions to learners

How do you feel about the course so far?

What have you liked in your course e.g. Work-based learning, meeting new people, making friends *etc.*

Give me an example of the positive and negative aspect of Work-based learning.

Give me an example of a module you enjoyed or something new that you have learnt on the course. Was it because of the teaching strategies used by the teacher?

How well have you been supported on the course e.g. pastoral care, tutorials, study skills?

Give me an example of how tutorial sessions have helped you or have been beneficial to you.

What aspects of study skills did you feel was useful for you?

What about the Curriculum delivery of the Foundation Degree? Any suggestions for improvement?

Now, what about your workplace? How did they react to you doing the Foundation Degree? Any problems? Anything else you want to add?

APPENDIX 4

Interview Questions to Employers

What are your views on the new Foundation Degree programme?

Do you think Work-based assessments are a good idea? Did you encounter any problems?

How did the WBL element help your employee to develop? Can you give examples?

How well were you supported by the Further Education College? Any suggestions for improvement?

Give me an example of how the Foundation Degree has helped your employee.

APPENDIX 5

CHECKLIST FOR QUESTIONNAIRES

	Number	Yes	No	Recommended changes
Questions appropriate?				
Jargon free?				
Easy to understand?				
Any leading questions?				
Questions with questions in them?				
Format readable?				
Totally confusing questions?				

Appendix 6

Research Interview Learners

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my research. As previously agreed the interview will take place on _____ in room _____ starting at _____. The interview should take no longer than one and a half hour.

The title of my research project is:

Examining practice: the perceptions of learners, and employers on a work-based Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree

I am interested in exploring the experiences of learners who are studying on the EYSEFD. The interview will cover topics on WBL assessments, pastoral support and study skills. You will be given a chance to talk about any other issues not covered in the questions relating to your experience as a learner on this course of study.

Before the interview goes ahead I would like to confirm that:

- The Principal, course co-ordinator and course tutor has given permission for this research to be carried out.
- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- A transcript of the interview will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your anonymity will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at anytime and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about any question please contact me at ujoshi@hackney.ac.uk

Finally, can I thank you for taking the time to help me with my research. It really is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Research Interview employers

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my research. As previously agreed the interview will take place on _____ in room _____ starting at _____. The interview should take no longer than hour.

The title of my research project is

Examining practice: the perceptions of learners, and employers on a
workbased Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree

I am interested in exploring the experiences of employers whose staff have enrolled on the EYSEFD. The interview will cover topics on WBL, whether you have noticed any changes in professional practice and the relationships with the Further Education Colleges.

Before the interview goes ahead I would like to confirm that:

- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- A transcript of the interview will be sent to you after the interview.
- Your anonymity will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you or your organization to a third party.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at anytime and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about any question please contact me at ujoshi@hackney.ac.uk

Finally, can I thank you for taking the time to help me with my research. It really is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Research questionnaire course tutors

Dear

Thank you for agreeing for your learners to take part in my research project As previously agreed the questionnaires will be handed out on _____ in room _____ starting at _____. This should take no longer than 45 minutes.

The title of my research project is

Examining practice: the perceptions of learners, and employers on a work based Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree

I am interested in exploring the experiences of learners and employers who are studying on the EYSEFD. The research hopes to focus on the impact of this new qualification for both learners and employers. It is anticipated that the research will highlight the impact on professional practice for learners and employers and the development of skills which in turn benefit both employers and employees. In addition, this research will also examine the manner in which pastoral care and study skills enables the academic vocational divide to be bridged and suggest ways in which the new qualification can be accommodated by employers, learners and Further Education colleges.

Before the questionnaires are handed out I would like to confirm that:

- The Principal has given permission for this research to be carried out.
- Your organization's anonymity will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify the learner or your organization to a third party.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at anytime and/or request that data from the questionnaires not be used.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

Could I please ask you to inform me if you have any learners who might need an interpreter or the questions presented on coloured paper or larger font please?

If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about any question please contact me at ujoshi@hackney.ac.uk

Finally, can I thank you for taking the time to help me with my research. It really is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Research Questionnaire Employers

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to complete the questionnaires for my research project. The title of my research project is

Examining practice: the perceptions of learners, and employers on a work based Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree

I am interested in exploring the experiences of employers whose employees are studying on the EYSEFD programme..

I would like to confirm that:

- Your anonymity will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at anytime and/or request that your transcript not be used.
- I will write to you on completion of the research and a copy of my final research report will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about any question please contact me at ujoshi@hackney.ac.uk

Finally, can I thank you for taking the time to help me with my research. It really is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX 7

Table 4.3: Checklist for analysing interviews

Date		
Time		
Time started		
Time finished		
Emerging themes		
Frequency of themes		
My mood		
Distractions		
No. of breaks taken		