Developing The Holistic Practitioner In Work Based Learning Provision For Young People In Local Community Settings: Leadership, community cohesion and social inclusion

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Research Publication Notices

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Executive Summary

This report explores the development of the ‘Holistic Practitioner’ in the delivery of learning to 14 to 19 year olds, within a group of London work based learning providers. Based on one to one interviews with heads of organisations delivering Entry to Employment/Foundation Learning and locally funded 14 to 16 provision, the research found that in the absence of a ready trained pool of teaching and practitioner staff, providers have responded by developing teaching and learning structures and appropriate roles within the remit of the values and ethos of their organisations. Holistic Practitioners are recruited on the basis of skills, attributes and experience as well as qualifications and are noted for their ability to engage and retain young people in learning. The development of the Holistic Practitioner is a logical approach and is crucial to providers’ success in supporting learners to progress and achieve. A small number of providers have developed the idea further in response to gaps in frameworks for wider learning in the post-16 sector. The report concludes that these developments, intuitive as well as logical in response provide an area for further enquiry and consideration by this group of providers.

Section 1: Introduction and Research Methodology

This research explores the notion of the ‘Holistic Practitioner’ in the delivery of learning to 14 to 19 year olds, within a group of London based work based learning (WBL) providers. The report builds upon an earlier piece of research carried out by the London WBL provider network, the London Work Based Learning Alliance (LWBLA) in 2008 (Dent and Stanton 2008 Define and Defend). That research explored the 14 to 16 learning delivered by Entry to Employment (e2e) providers, a vocationally based entry and level 1 programme for 16 to 18 year olds facing barriers to learning and formal achievements.

One of the main findings of that work was the development of what some providers were terming the Holistic Practitioner within this vocationally based 14 to 19 provision. These were a group of practitioners working in and across each organisation who had been recruited (to work with young people) on the basis of skills and experience as much as qualifications, and who were seen to be unique and special in their ability to engage and retain young people in learning. It appeared from this research, that a new type of teaching and learning professional was being developed. Each provider saw this as their specific organisational response yet it was a common response across organisations.

This research further explores this flexible and innovative response and considers the ways in which providers have responded to meeting the needs of groups of learners with diverse needs, with none or little previous academic achievement. In particular it considers how this response has developed and the manner in which providers interpret and understand their response.

1.1 The context

During the period of the research the providers interviewed were undergoing several major shifts resulting in multiple impacts upon provision. Briefly these included a major programme shift from e2e to the introduction of Foundation Learning (FL). During the year, 2009 to 2010 providers were preparing for replacement of e2e by FL in August 2010. Similar in its tripartite
curriculum to e2e, with emphasis upon vocational learning, personal and social development along with maths, English and IT, it differs significantly in that the programme is qualifications based. Providers of e2e measure formal success based on progression, and whilst they are not required to deliver qualifications, all of those interviewed did. FL has a strong focus on qualifications as the measure of success for each learner. The FL guidance issued by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) at the time stated that FL will cater for learners with a ‘spiky profile’ who will benefit from the personalised, ‘wrap-around’ programme delivered by e2e/FL providers. FL is also one of the four lines of learning within 14 to 19 provision and is a key policy driver in supporting the first stage introduction of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) to 17 in 2013, and then to 18 in 2015. FL is seen as a key point of engagement in learning for those young people at risk of or who have already dropped out of learning. In this context the research is timely, as it explores practice which has evolved to support these very groups of young people in learning, both now and in the longer term.

1.2 Research methodology

To provide continuity with the earlier report Define and Defend, the same group of 20 providers were approached to be interviewed for this research. With a couple of exceptions, all agreed to be interviewed. (Appendix 1 lists the organisations and range of provision.) The providers are geographically dispersed across London, in inner and outer city boroughs. The majority are small local providers delivering a local e2e offer and a variation of 14-16 provision delivered in partnership with local schools and councils.

Interviews were held at the provider’s premises, and with two exceptions were held with the Chief Executive or Managing Director, as the research also sought to establish the impact of leadership upon the development of the Holistic Practitioner approach. Interviews were held on a one to one basis and adhered to a loosely structured interview schedule (Appendix 2). The interview schedule consisted of a range of broad themes which acted as discussion points and allowed the interviewee to talk freely and to range across a variety of themes and issues. The themes were:

- 14-19 offer available for 14-16’s and post-16’s;
- Your organisation, organisational ethos and values;
- Approach to learning delivery including staffing arrangements and staff background and qualifications;
- Drivers influencing delivery and engagement;
- Your role as leader in creating the learning environment.

Finally interviewees were asked to end the interview by describing what successful learning looked like in their organisation.

Interviews were carried out by the two researchers and allocated geographically (one concentrated on providers in north London and one on those in south London). Notes were made in the course of each interview and written up afterwards. A decision was made not to tape and then transcribe each interview due to the time limits of the research and the time consuming task of transcription.

Each interviewee was apprised of the research confidentiality policy whereby the contents of the report will not attribute any evidence or quotations to either individuals or organisations,
nor will it be shared directly with any other participants other than via the written report. All
participants agreed for their organisation and name to be referred to in the report credits.

There was a planned further stage to the research, however, due to widespread viral illness
amongst both researchers and interviewees in the early part of 2010, these research
interviews were delayed. This final stage will now be carried out in Spring of 2010. And will
bring together a group of the research respondents on a self-selecting basis, to review the
findings. This process will incorporate discussion of the findings and identifying if any next
steps providers would like to take in further consideration and development of the Holistic
Practitioner model of learning delivery, within the current context of transition referred to
earlier.

1.3 Report structure

The report has four sections followed by conclusions and recommendations. Each section
draws upon the material collected during interviews and to start with, in Section 2, a
definition of Holistic Practitioner is provided as a basis for the rest of the report, with a
succinct summary of the drivers behind its development.

Section three condenses the research findings to outline the different models of Holistic
Practitioner, considered along a continuum; three models are outlined in order to provide an
insight into the different ways in which providers are approaching and developing wider
learning environments to meet the needs of young people who previously have not fully
engaged in learning.

Based upon interviews with leaders regarding their role and personal drivers, section four
considers the impact of leadership upon the extent to which the Holistic Practitioner idea is
developed and modelled.

Finally, the report considers whether the Holistic Practitioner model could be the most
logical, as well as intuitive, choice for this group of providers to develop. Given the groups of
learners engaging in this provision providers are seeking to create learning environments
which are about learning in its broadest sense as a means to replicate much of what many of
the young people have not benefitted from either in terms of formal learning, social, familial
and/or economic support.

The report finishes with conclusions and recommendations.

Section 2: Development of the Holistic Practitioner

2.1 The Holistic Practitioner

The providers see the model of the Holistic Practitioner as the ideal kind of practice for
working with the groups of young people accessing learning in their organisations. This
applies particularly to the programmes they deliver to young people aged 14-16 and to those
young people aged 16-18 on e2e/FL programmes.

The idea of the Holistic Practitioner embodies a range of ideas and attributes incorporating:
• An approach to learning that is young person centred;
• A method of working with and engaging young people with multiple needs who face barriers to learning;
• Learning based on broader principles related to other professional practices including Youth Work, Social Work, primary school teaching, vocational;
• Skills, attributes and experience of the individual practitioner.

Core to the notion of the Holistic Practitioner is learning delivery that is young person centred in its approach. One of the main distinctions of this provision is the approach to the relationships both the organisation and individuals within it cultivate with young people. One of the key attributes of individuals in this role is the ability to have an empathy with young people to enable the establishment of a personal rapport and level of trust. For some providers the role was seen as being age related to enable this. In the research this role is more often seen as pastoral rather than as a tutor role, although there were variations (see Section 4). The ability to build these types of relationships with young learners is considered crucial as the starting point for the development of young people from the moment they step through the door. One provider summarised this approach as follows:

“The point is the issues for disadvantaged and disaffected young people runs through, there is a core element; the young people are looking for individuals to get them through the passage to the end journey.”

(Provider)

This approach is supported by a range of established organisational and quality processes to enable learner centred delivery from initial assessment through to regular individual learning reviews.

The young people attending the providers that were interviewed demonstrate a broad range of needs with a shared commonality of not having achieved academically. The young people attending the learning providers have not only frequently had a negative experience of formal learning; their own lives outside of the structures of education have been tough and frequently traumatic. In addition a few providers, rather self-consciously, used the word ‘love’ to describe the characteristics of this practice. They argue that young people need to be loved in order to feel worthy and to believe they can change their lives for the better.

The combination of needs, frequent lack of academic success and the transitional pull towards adulthood require a method of working which goes beyond a learning perspective to integrate aspects of a youth and social work style of approach and often that of the primary school teacher:

“Primary teachers know the basics of how to teach things that are missing.”

(Provider)
In advocating a learning environment which acknowledges the needs of young people, providers often looked for this kind of professional expertise and skill in potential staff as well as and/or in addition to personal attributes and approach gained from both work and life experiences. Providers noted that individuals without these skills and attributes frequently left within the first few months. It was also noted that working with these groups of learners can be challenging and individuals need the skills and emotional resources not to take criticism and abuse personally, to see through the anger and distressing behaviours to the vulnerability which causes it.

2.2 Origins of a practice

The majority of providers who took part in the research can be classed as voluntary and community sector organisations as well as often having leaders whose personal motivations were strongly rooted in working with young people. This in turn influenced the ethos and values both instilled within the staff and within the organisation itself. Frequently Holistic Practitioner staff are attracted by this working environment as it matches their own ethos and approach to working with young people.

In discussing the origins of the approach, some interviewees referred back to the beginning of their own organisations and the development of government funding to support unemployed young people during the recession of the nineteen eighties. One provider linked current practice directly back to the eighties Youth Training Scheme (YTS), a training programme for disaffected young people. They commented that the young people accessing YTS were those who did not achieve five ‘O’ levels at A to C and who faced domestic and social issues, similar to the groups accessing programmes like e2e today. Although some providers also expressed the thought that the extent of problems young people were demonstrating now were far more widespread.

The impact of the Manpower Services Commission and the rise of government training schemes for young people saw the development of embryonic elements of the Holistic Practitioner approach. Training organisations required staff who could provide the requisite learning support but who were also able to provide, or at least quickly develop the ability to incorporate wider social and personal learning and support. This group of staff had to be prepared to take this on as a daily part of their workload in order to engage the young people.

Over twenty-five years later, many of those same providers have evolved, responded and adapted to various government programmes. Within this time experience and knowledge has led to a more inclusive and personalized approach to learning supported by policy strategies arising out of greater understanding of the causes of social exclusion as well as education and learning policies promoting personalised learning with a nod to the role of personal and social learning. As noted in Section 1, FL providers are fully expected to provide a ‘wrap around’ to their learning programmes, a catch –all phrase which touches on the notion of the Holistic Practitioner.
Section 3: Different models of Holistic Practitioner

“*We are delivering qualifications but it is by our design.*”

(Provider Interviewee)

Providers delivering e2e/FL ensure young people achieve qualifications, often for the first time in their young lives. What they are challenged with is taking young people from entry level in a matter of weeks or months. Engaging the young people and developing a desire in them to learn and to believe in themselves is crucial. This trade off between the delivery of qualifications, involving the requirement of sound teaching practice and learner progress and the one-to-one and group interventions which enable young people to access that learning, to remain in the classroom or workshop and make progress is common for all the providers taking part in the research.

3.1 The right staff

“You can't teach someone to get on well with a young person; personality, empathy, work experience – if you don't have that you're never going to build mutual respect.”

(Provider Interviewee)

Providers seek to recruit practitioners who for them have a ‘perfect’ combination of classroom skills, vocational experience and competency in addition to the characteristics outlined previously. The ‘perfect’ practitioner is rare, and providers report they come across very few of these individuals. One provider referred to such a member of staff but recognised that this individual was a one-off who had a unique background, the wider organisational issue being posed for this Chief Executive was how to develop and recruit a staff base to support the ideal type of practice.

The experience of one provider highlights the issues. This provider planned to implement a model whereby all teaching staff would also be Holistic Practitioners, however the implementation was not successful. The reason cited for this was because existing staff were unable to develop these skills combined with difficulty in recruiting qualified teachers who are also skilled Holistic Practitioners. This was a common refrain as the experience of many providers demonstrated that the traditional teacher training route did not on the whole provide them with access to qualified teachers who also possessed the required combination of skills, mindset and life experience, equipping them to work successfully with the groups of young people the providers work with. For many providers the way to acquire suitable teaching staff was to recruit on skills and experience with a track record of successful working with young people, then once in post the provider will support them to achieve their teaching qualifications. All providers were involved in training staff to achieve their Qualified Teachings and Learning Status (QTLS). A common pattern is to mix this with ‘growing our own’ and recruiting from previous learners. The latter also means that providers recruit young staff who can directly relate to the experiences of many of the learners, and to whom
the learners themselves may well be able to relate and to consider as role models. For example one provider had recently appointed an ex-learner, now a qualified teacher as a head of department. After searching for a suitable candidate, the provider admitted that previously this person had been overlooked due to their young age, but in hindsight their experience as a learner, combined with their subsequent professional development and skills gave them the edge.

In the absence of a ready trained pool of teaching and practitioner staff, providers have responded by developing teaching and learning structures and appropriate roles within the remit of the values and ethos of their organisations. These are broadly based on:

- A classroom/workshop practitioner who will have some strong teaching and learning experience, and may also possess some Holistic Practitioner attributes. It did not seem to be the norm that this group of staff would possess these skills, and on occasion, they may be reluctant to begin to assimilate any Holistic Practitioner characteristics;
- A learning advisor/support role where the individual spends most of their time meeting students outside of the formal learning place, providing personal advice and support, developing a tailored learning programme, reviewing and monitoring progress, working with external agencies to access specialist support, acting as an advocate to the teaching staff and adopting a mentoring role to keep the learner in learning.

Variations of this existed throughout the provider organisations interviewed, and the emerging models exits along a continuum, where at one end there is the Holistic Practitioner as the support both to young people and to the teaching staff. At the other end and developing in between is an approach that is based on the Holistic Practitioner as well as an organisational approach to thinking and implementing something broader, which culminates in a different kind of learning environment. Below, three models are outlined to illustrate the differing ways in which providers are utilising the Holistic Practitioner.

**Provider A** e2e learners are taught in a formal classroom and more latterly workshop groups, where they may also be mixed in with learners on other programmes. These sessions are delivered by basic skills tutors and vocational teachers. There is a support tutor who works with students on a one to one basis providing the learner support role. On occasion this support tutor may also be called upon by teaching staff to sit in on formal learning to provide support to individuals and to offset potential behavioural issues.

This support tutor is a qualified teacher with significant experience, who in the course of their teaching career discovered that they had the skills and mindset to successfully engage with the more difficult learners. Supported by a senior manager, the Support Tutor carries a fair proportion of responsibility for the success of the e2e programme. The support provided is significant and extends to family liaison and external work where necessary, as well as giving encouragement to the teaching staff and championing the learners. A key part of their role involves liaising with teaching staff to support the progression of e2e learners onto other internal programmes at level 1 and level 2.

**Provider B** employs staff who are all qualified to teach either prior to employment or who are trained and qualified to teach in their respective subject and skills areas once in post. There are no separate support staff. All teaching and non-teaching staff (for example
administrators) are required to possess skills and/or experience, combined with empathy, which equate to organisational values and complement the community and family feel of this small organisation.

The organisation bases its work with young people on the 'Four Windows' approach supported by four key relationship skills required in supporting young people to achieve in learning and in life.

The Four windows are describes as:

- **Belonging** which expresses the need to create a family and community to which both staff and young people belong;
- **Learning** which emphasises learning in the formal academic sense as well as developing the ability, in young people and staff to learn from each other;
- **Meaning** which provides a focus on meaning in an individual’s life and understanding attitudes and the way in which these can impact on learning, relationships, work;
- **Celebration** to provide a focus for meaning and to celebrate both the small and the big events.

All staff and young people are expected to be aware of and to use the four windows, which are referred to visually, conversationally and within learning situations.

The four relationship skills identified as key in underpinning this are:

- **Respect**, staff are required to be genuine, sensitive and alert to the dignity of young people;
- **Understanding** the need to work within the limitations and potential of young people in groups and as individuals as well as being aware of their fears and strengths. This to support towards positive, anti-harming behaviours;
- **Affection** 'engaging young people with the heart' to develop confident and positive relationships with young people;
- **Humour** fun and laughter in both young people and adults.

Provider C has developed a whole organisational approach based on **Critical Skills**. A programme imported from the United States, Critical Skills is about creating a learning community and transforming pedagogy and curriculum. Critical Skills takes a holistic approach to both the delivery of teaching and the development of individuals based on the core ideas of:

- A collaborative learning community
- Experiential learning
- Problem based learning
- Results driven learning

All staff involved in delivering all aspects of the e2e programme took part in Critical Skills training and staff work in teams in the classroom. When vocational teaching expertise is required, vocational teachers from the apprenticeship programme contribute. Learners work on discrete projects and are encouraged to display their learning and at the end of each project they are required to present to and take questions from the Chief Executive, akin to the notion of the lead learner.
3.2 Summary

Providers require teaching and support staff with a mix of skills, experience and qualifications who they know can engage and retain difficult young people in learning, in a daily work setting that can be challenging, draining and stimulating. The Holistic Practitioner is crucial for these providers and is at least the starting point for key aspects of their delivery model.

In provider A, the most basic model is at work and in provider C the approach has been used as a starting point to completely renew the way in which learning is delivered and perceived by both learners and staff.

Section 4: Leadership of Holistic Practice and Practitioners

4.1 Developing Holistic Practice

Providers need to create roles which allow young people to develop strong personal relationships with the adults who work with the group. This is reflected in class sizes and adult to learner ratios, which are on average 1:8 in the sector. Overall, providers find it difficult to find enough individuals with the appropriate skills to work with their learners. They describe their staff as value-driven, and these people are not easy to find. The sector is low profile and even ‘hidden’ from the generality of the teaching profession. This was reflected in the profile of teaching staff within the organisations, where hardly any had come into teaching via the traditional route of school followed by university and the post-graduate teaching qualification.

The WBL providers create roles which maximise the input of Holistic Practice – teachers who have more of those attributes can achieve more effective outcomes and managers can focus on the further development of these attributes in their teaching staff. Lucas (2008) refers to the need to put learning at the centre of the learning and skills workforce agenda, something which this group of providers have been doing on an intuitive response basis for some time. Lucas also refers to the development of the growth of the learner voice and engagement within Further Education colleges, echoed also in the post-16 provision delivered by this group of WBL providers. However, Lucas maintains that there is a need for a more ‘radical’ approach geared towards developing learning communities and he goes on to outline key indicators of a learning culture (Lucas 2008; pp18-19). Leadership and the role of the leader are key.

The employment of Holistic Practitioners has led providers to thinking about learning and what this means within the context of their organisations and as shown in the previous section some leaders within this group of providers have started to think more broadly about what learning in their organisation means and looks like.

4.2 Leadership and developing learning

Developing and maintaining Holistic Practice and developing and retaining Holistic Practitioner staff is a constant focus for this group of leaders and often a mission critical task. One provider, a charity, commented that the organisation’s unique selling point was the learners it worked with. Local schools and other agencies expected them to take on the
'naughty boys', this was their position within the range of local learning providers. As an organisation their business was to work with this group of learners from the age of 14 and to support them to succeed and progress.

One of the factors behind the development of the Holistic Practitioner is the influence and role of the organisational head. All those interviewed were personally as well as professionally driven to work with young people, whether the organisation was commercial or part of the voluntary and community sector. Personal drivers were influenced by a range of factors from individual experiences of education, personal experiences and the desire to feel that they were making a difference. All had a strong commitment to practical and vocational education and a small number had started organisations when such training was not as available as it is now.

Professionally they varied in background from the Civil Service to Counselling. Some had experience of working with young people including training as Youth Workers and/or Primary School teachers. The majority have a professional background in learning and skills, in business and in the voluntary and community sector.

Many saw their role as being to embody and promote the organisational values and ethos. Their commitment to the development of Holistic Practitioners and practice was a key element in ensuring and upholding that the organisation was staying true to its focus. One interviewee stated:

“I do embody the values, it’s not a conscious effort, it’s what I do, it’s a joy. I understand the barriers young people face, it’s the buzz, when a young person gets up and tells their story.”

(Interviewee)

Another interviewee expressed the importance of values on influencing the way in which learning was both considered and delivered:

“Are we just a holding tank or do we take young people and springboard them on and facilitate their development? Success and progression is enshrined in everything we do, so young people have a very clear notion of success when they get here. Well being is also one of our core values, we take care of them, support their holistic needs, but when they leave we are equipping them for economic well being. What we are trying to teach them is the value of themselves and that they are all highly valued. For kids who’ve never been valued that’s a huge leap of faith.”

(Interviewee)

This statement encapsulates much of what the interviewees are trying to achieve with their learning practice and delivery, if individuals are not allowed to start valuing themselves then learning becomes more difficult the further that young person moves away from opportunities to learn.
A small number of leaders, who saw their role as directly influencing learning within the organisation had begun to build upon the Holistic Practitioner workforce in a considered and thought out way, thinking more broadly about how they can embody their organisational values within the learning environments they create and this is looked at in Section 5.

However, a significant issues facing providers at the time of interview was the introduction of FL. Their concern is that a qualification driven learning programme might exclude the more vulnerable groups of learners who will struggle to cope, providers understand that this group of learners benefit from a wider approach to learning which often then leads to some formal learning success.

4.3 Leadership Challenges – the road ahead

Many interviewees expressed concern that the new FL structures and requirements, with an emphasis on qualification attainment, will distort current practice and resourcing, and may under-resource Holistic Practitioners. The same interviewee quoted above went on to comment:

“I think it’s quite prevalent in training providers (referring to his approach as above) and it’s why they do it, but it’s becoming increasingly difficult to do that.”

(Interviewee)

This is likely to have the impact of fewer young people being retained in learning – and going on into employment. This may also have significant impact on the success of Raising of the Participation Age. However when asked if they would adjust their recruitment of young people to suit the new programme demands, most were adamant that they would not as this undermined the organisational mission. This was typical of one provider’s response:

“No absolutely not because I am prepared to take the hit and argue tooth and nail with Inspectors. You may get providers recruiting the most able but the cohort normally catered for under e2e will remain NEET (not in employment, education or training).”

(Provider)

Section 5: Holistic Practitioner – the logical approach

5.1 Introduction

The Holistic Practitioner is a response to meeting the needs of young people aged 14 to 19 who fall into a range of groups but whose defining characteristic is to have experienced barriers to full engagement and achievement in a formal educational setting. The providers referred to the need to provide the young people accessing their provision with appropriate personal and social support, in order for them to develop the broader skills they need for
learning. All viewed the recruitment of the right staff with the right approach as key to their success with this group of learners.

Providers have responded to a gap in the workforce through the development of an operational response, more or less thought out depending upon available resources, and their strategies are outlined below.

There are some providers, referred to in the previous section, who have begun to extend the Holistic Practitioner to post-16 provision. These providers are transforming their provision through considering the different ways in which learning is delivered and in particular how they can create a learning environment which embodies organisational values and supports a community of learning.

5.2 A Workforce response

Providers have responded to gaps in the teaching and support staff workforce with the development of the Holistic Practitioner. This appears to have been an intuitive response across the provider interviewed as they have adapted to meet the needs of learners. The immediate need outlined was to engage, retain and support young people to succeed in learning.

To achieve this providers have engaged in the following strategies:

- Created roles which allow young people to develop strong personal relationships with the adults who work with the group. This is reflected in class sizes and adult; learner ratios, which are on average 1:8 in the sector;
- They describe their staff as value-driven and these people are not easy to find. The sector is low profile and even ‘hidden’ from the generality of the teaching profession. Providers create roles which maximise the input of Holistic Practice – teachers who exhibit more of these skills and attributes can achieve more effective outcomes; managers can focus on the further development of these attributes in their teaching staff;
- A number of organisations seek to find Holistic Practitioners from their own ‘graduates’, young people who have been through the WBL system, sometimes through their own provision, typically this would be a young person who has gone through e2e, achieved a level three apprenticeship and moved up the employment ladder. They are regarded as particularly effective by the providers who employ them;
- Many providers are concerned that the new FL structures and requirements, with an emphasis on qualification attainment, will distort current practice and resourcing, and may under-resource Holistic Practitioner work. This is likely to have the impact of fewer young people being kept in learning – and going on into employment.

5.3 Creating a learning environment

In responding to gaps in the workforce, some providers have also started to respond to broader gaps in post-16 learning and skills provision, beyond the programme frameworks of e2e and FL. Many learners coming into this sector from mainstream education have found their previous experience frustrating (Edge 2009). The same report also noted that disadvantaged learners were motivated by engagement in practical learning and the
place of learning within a broad setting. It is also clear from the annual GCSE results (DCSF 2009) that a significant percentage of 16 year olds do not achieve the requisite 5 A to C’s, and the prospect of different ways of learning could be appealing to both young people and teachers alike.

In Section 3, providers were outlined along a continuum and it is clear that a number of providers, albeit a small number have begun to think about and explore the Holistic Practitioner notion in more depth. They have begun to consider ways in which to shape the learning environment based on partnership between learners and teachers. This partnership aims to prepare young people for the world beyond formal learning (a world which can both threatening and traumatic on a personal level for learners), in which they can negotiate and maintain the transition to successful adulthood. This small group of providers have begun to think about frameworks for learning outside of the multiple frameworks within which they operate including funded programme frameworks, the Common Inspection Framework, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance structures. In seeking to deliver meaningful learning which is more than qualifications led, providers have begun to seek solutions elsewhere.

Provider C outlined in Section 3 goes well beyond the ‘wrap around’ expected of providers, referred to in Section 1 and ventures into a new learning environment where pedagogy, learning, and teacher-learner relationships and the notion of the classroom are completely revised. Provider B does not go as far but has developed a considered approach to creating a learning environment based on mutuality and a culture of respect supported by appropriate behaviours with a high value placed on learning for life.

There is now a growing debate about learning environments, one which is largely restricted to schools, although Bill Lucas has extended this debate into post-16 funded provision. Of the former, the Harris Federation for example in partnership with NESTA (2009) have engaged in a two year project with pupils and teachers in their schools to explore how learning environments can be developed to provide young people with the broad skills and attributes (as well as the knowledge) they need to negotiate the world including the impact of major social and technological changes on it. This has involved exploring the potential role of learners and teachers and the nature of the partnerships between them, in addition to considering the content of learning.

In Wider Skills for Learning (Lucas 2009) takes this discussion into further education as well as schools and provides a critical and occasionally cheeky overview of wider skills frameworks. Lucas is critical of many of the current frameworks and indeed of the way in which ‘skills’ are used, almost as shorthand to describe what is needed. He argues that wider skills (sic) also need to incorporate broader attributes, ‘dispositions and habits of mind’ (p.31, 2009) as well as purpose of intent in relaying cultural messages and values. It seems that this debate may have something to contribute to and gain from the responses of the providers in this study.

Section 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- The development of the Holistic Practitioner is a response by this group of providers to the needs of learners aged 14-19 experiencing barriers to achieving in mainstream
learning. Providers seek to support young people in a learner responsive environment staffed by teaching and support staff with a range of skills, attributes and knowledge which enables them to retain, engage and progress young people in learning.
- A number of organisations seek to find Holistic Practitioners from their own ‘graduates’ young people who have been through the WBL system, sometimes through their own provision. They are regarded as particularly effective by the providers who employ them.
- Training and development for these practitioners is variable. Some managers see the teaching role as a ‘progression’ believing that this has higher status and often higher pay. Other managers see the Holistic Practitioner role as being parallel and of equal status, but few have a structure which facilitates their progression other than into management.
- Many providers are concerned that the new FL structures and requirements, with an emphasis on qualification attainment, will distort current practice and resourcing, and may under-resource current practices. This is likely to have the impact of fewer young people staying in learning and going on into employment. This may also have significant impact on the success of Raising of the Participation Age.
- The role of the Chief Executive sets the extent to which the Holistic Practitioner notion is developed and expanded. In these cases the Chief Executive provides a ‘lead learner’ role.
- A minority of providers have begun to establish wider frameworks for learning which reconfigure the basis of learning in the organisation.

Recommendations

- To date providers have developed their approach in isolation from one another. There is a need to stimulate and support a wider debate amongst the providers, as well as to extend it to providers in other regions.
- The wider skills frameworks could provide a useful backdrop to a broader debate as well as to highlight the solutions being developed within post-16 provision.
- The introduction of FL poses potential challenges in engaging learners for whom the focus is work. FL’s emphasis upon qualification as the measure of success could potentially isolate some learners and undermine some of the innovative practice that has been and is currently still being developed. The architecture of FL should be revised and reconsidered.
- Providers frequently find that the ready qualified teaching workforce is unable to meet required skills and attributes to work with this group of learners. This leads to a situation where providers train their own or via a local college. This can lead to an insecure and fragile workforce supply. There is a need to review teacher training for the post-16 sector to ensure that the flow of suitable staff are equipped and supported.
- Further work to include in-depth exploration of the Holistic Practitioner workforce, support and training needs with a view to mainstreaming practice across post-16 provision in work with young learners.
- Further work to include the views of learners to establish their experiences of learning in mainstream and post-16 provision.
- Practitioners and practice needs saving and nurturing. Quality bodies like LSIS have a role to play in providing capacity building support to FL providers to maintain and develop current innovations.
References

Critical Skills go to www.criticalskills.co.uk


Low, D; and Kenyon, J; on behalf of the Edge Learner Forum (2009) How to make staying on a carrot and not a stick: Youth Commission: raising the participation age for education to 18 Research Report, Youth Commission.


Appendix 1: Lists of Organisations and Interviewees

Bosco – Sister Cecily
Chelmer Training – Jo Basham
Choices for All – Marie Harrison
City of Westminster College – Kemi
DV8 – Alexis Michaelides and Paul Morton
First Rung – Diane Vickers
Harington Scheme – Joanne Baxter
JACE – Chris
Keep It Simple Training – Sue Simpson
Landmark Training – Chris Mandl
Passage Training – Ronnie Rechere
Quest – Jan Lowe
Roots and Shoots – Linda Phillips
Skills for Growth – Ashley McCaul
Springboard Islington – Denis Dillon

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Introduction: explain research confidentiality policy and the purpose and method of the interview.

1. Explain the aims of the research and its origins.
2. Please describe your 14-19 provision, including post-16 funded programmes and 14-16 delivery. Cover funding type, numbers of learners, learner challenges.
3. Can you tell me about your organisation? Cover type, ethos, values, locality and role locally.
4. Learning delivery focusing on staffing arrangements for teaching and support roles; staff backgrounds to include:
   - How many staff do you employ?
   - How many staff work directly with 14-19 year olds i.e. teaching and support roles?
   - Please describe the roles of your staff who work with 14-19 year olds.
   - How would you describe the personal and professional attributes of your staff?
   - What is the professional background of your staff working with 14-19’s?
5. What would you say were the main drivers influencing your delivery? Cover organisational values, funding, and policy drivers. Also explore how this has impacted upon any staff developments.
6. Can you tell me about your role as head of the organisation? How do you think you influence learning?