Head, heart and hands: constructing a holistic approach to professional identity development in the early childhood workforce.

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Context for doctoral study

- Political focus on professionalisation of early years workforce (Parker, 2013)
- Debate about nature of professionalisation (Moss, 2010; Osgood, 2010)
- Early Years Practice remains unrecognised, hidden by public perceptions – role is low paid and low status
- My research is part of body of research seeking to contest dominant views by focusing on practitioner voices (Brock, 2012, 2006a, 2006b, 2001; Goouch, 2010; Simpson, 2010a, 2010b).
The schoolification of Early Childhood Education and Care

With the emphasis on the importance of early childhood for development there has been a huge shift from caring to education.

ECEC repositioned in society as important preparation for school that will ultimately support thriving labour market.

Van Leare et al. (2014) argue that due to this schoolification “less attention is given to the caring and emotional nurturing dimension of education of young children” (p.236).
Who defines what a professional is? Sector definitions or imposed from above?
Lloyd and Hallet (2010) suggested a model of professionalism which included three main elements:

“the monopolisation of specific and exclusive skills and knowledge;

group member solidarity and

restricted access to learning opportunities requiring accreditation to practice” (p.76).
Brock (2005) dimensions of professionalism

- **Knowledge** Specialist knowledge, unique expertise, experience
- **Education and training** Higher education, qualification, practical experience, obligation to engage in CPD
- **Skills** Competence and efficacy, task complexity, communication, judgment
- **Autonomy** Entry requirement, self-regulation and standards, voice in public policy, discretionary judgment
- **Values** Ideology, altruism, dedication, service to clients
- **Ethics** Codes of conduct, moral integrity, confidentiality, trustworthiness, responsibility
- **Reward** Influence, social status, power, vocation
Bringing it all together: Holistic Silhouette Analysis

Head - knowledge, reason and thinking
Heart - feelings, values and beliefs
Hands - professionalism worked out in practice
(re)presenting the key words and phrases from the three categories of head, heart and hands.

**Fig 3.4 Example of holistic silhouette analysis stage 4.** (Re)presenting key words taken from data analysis of original transcripts into the aspects of head, heart and hands.

**KNOWLEDGE**
- I think
- ...am I thinking too much?
- Questioning/questioner
- Books / reading/
- Enjoy study /Reflective
- Get sorted in my head
- Move on academically
- Higher plane/be at the top educationally/one step ahead

**FEELINGS, VALUES AND BELIEFS**
- I'm happy and content with what I'm doing
- Emotional knowledge:
- What is right for children.
- Internal motivation.
- Happy children, smiling staff, happy families.
- Confident and enthusiastic with ethos.
- Ofsted:
  - fearful, despondent, sort of cloud, panic

**ASPECTS OF PRACTICE**
- Ethos
  - Being risky, physical
  - Outdoors: big walks
  - Child at the centre
  - Children deeply involved
- Environment
  - Home from home
  - Flexibility
  - Staff consistency
  - Time for cuddles
  - Good at care

**Key to Figure:**
Key words have been identified from original interview data and appear (re)presented here. Words relating to knowledge are placed in the head, words to do with feelings, values and beliefs in the body (the heart) and words to do with aspects of practice cross from the body to the outside – representing the enactment of practice (the hands).

Words in italics are the participants own words, other text is where I have interpreted aspects as demonstrated in table 3.3. The bold text indicates emerging themes I have identified and in places I have used these as headings to help organise the key words.
In this model:
- The head represents the place of knowledge, reasoning and thinking.
- The heart represents the place to acknowledge feelings, values and beliefs.
- The hands represent how the head and heart are worked out in practice.

Practice includes the way you speak/communicate to children, other practitioners and parents. Have you heard what you say? And how do you say it?

Practice is what you do, often you may do this instinctively, but where have your instincts come from? Sometimes we do things because others do them, or it's always been done that way. But how do we know this is good practice?
Utilising the model with Undergraduate students:

Example 1
“In the future, perhaps when I am a practitioner myself, I will ensure that nursery rhymes are an important aspect of what I teach. I believe they are a vital tool in teaching language, and their importance must not be underrated. In addition to this, I believe they are a fun and attractive way of engaging children, and teaching them language in a way that does not feel like learning. Shwetha (2013) supports this through saying that the best methods to teach language are those that use comprehensible input in low anxiety situations, with interesting messages. From this, nursery rhymes are the ideal, as they are fun and performed in an informal environment.”
Heart: The children need more space to fun around and expel energy before going back into the classroom. I feel as though the children need the space and time to expel the energy as they get told a lot to stop running in the rooms inside. I believe that if they had the space to run around outside they would be more focused and ‘chilled out’ within the building.

Head: The preschool has not got a large facility for the children to run around due to the building they are in. However, there is a local park but have only experienced them going to the park once. I have not personally seen the children at the park.

Hands: I think the best thing to do for this is to see if they are able to do an inside obstacle course to help the children expel energy. Although this is in the classroom and they may have to have a crazy thirty minutes, these thirty minutes will impact the rest of the day.
During assembly (whilst the teaching assistant was away from the classroom) it was my responsibility to look after this particular child, and so I was able to put these behaviour techniques into practice. This approach to behaviour support involved an hourglass timer, the timer indicates the amount of time the child must sit and focus, stopping him from getting distracted by children and other objects (his usual behaviour). If the timer has finished and he has been ‘good’ he is allowed to be given a puzzle piece, if this puzzle is filled by the end of the day he is allowed to open a ‘special box’ which has a random object inside (he is allowed to play with this object for around 2 minutes). Putting this approach into place during the assembly was very successful and meant that he was able to focus on what was being taught, compared to previous weeks where he would rather run off out of the classroom. Personally, I believe introducing positive reinforcements for particular children is a great way of motivating them to learn and to promote positive behaviour in general. This was observed by Skinner (1938) in his study of conditioning behaviour where he coined the term ‘operant conditioning’. The basic premise of this type of conditioning is that behaviour is directly controlled by its consequences. Positive reinforcements can be used to motivated people to carry out a certain behaviour many times, in order to receive the reward again and again. In my particular context the puzzle pieces will act as a positive reinforcement for the child to promote good behaviour. I hope to observe this further, in order to study whether or not this positive reinforcement has a beneficial effect on his behaviour and his approach to learning in the future.
Reflection in action…the whole person

- As a parent, my first reaction was one of sympathy toward the parent who felt she was inadequate. In addition I had also had similar feelings, so could really empathise with how the parent was feeling.

- As a professional, concern was raised about the effects of this on the child himself, and my responsibility to ensure the holistic well being of the child. also, the importance of co operative relationships between parents and practitioners.

- I realised this situation had left me weighing up my professional and personal feelings, and the way in which they were informing my practice. because of this I felt it important to take a step back to evaluate the correct course of action for this situation.
In conclusion

- Head, heart and hands; a holistic approach to professional development and professional identity.

- A possible creative and accessible way of supporting professionalisation through building a confident workforce who have the skills to reflectively synthesise the different elements that are required to perform professionally.