**Wellbeing: Work-Life Balance & Women Learners**

**Joanne Smith**

**Summary:** This conference paper aimed at providing a brief overview of the presenters PhD study. The paper considered the potential wellbeing benefits of learning. Whilst looking at how the issue of Work-Life Balance (WLB) interacts with the challenges and benefits of learning, hence linking with WLB and wellbeing themes. Furthermore, the paper aimed at reflecting the experiences of women learners on work-based learners to show the strategies they use to succeed and where their motivation comes from.

A link between wellbeing and learning has been clearly identified: *Field, (2009,) finds that:* ***“The evidence that learning promotes well-being is overwhelming”***

*New Economics Foundation (2009)* also finds that:

***“Learning encourages social interaction and increases self-esteem and feelings of competency…….”***

***“…will enable individuals to develop new skills, strengthen social networks, and feel more able to deal with life’s challenges.”***

The research is based upon a mixed method, including data from surveys, in-depth interviews and 2 focus groups, with respondents being learners on Foundation Degrees in Early Years. The research forms a case study, with the thesis based upon a thematic review. The nature of the programme of study is around Work-based learning, which meant that the participant’s, were combining study with working, which had implications for their pursuit of WLB and thus their wellbeing. The demands upon the learners were made up from their family and the domestic, workplace and the need to dedicate time to employment. Further demands came from study, in terms of the study day / evening at University or college, as well as independent study. Pressure experienced was seen to cause time pressure in other parts of life, including participation in leisure, the depletion of which can affect personal wellbeing. (Cassidy, 2005) The presentation attempted to reflect the experiences of the learners in terms of feeling they were not able to do things well, that they neglected the needs of the home. There were also feelings of guilt, associated with being focused upon study, which were sometimes seen to be at the expense of time with the family. However, there were strategies used which enabled the participants to succeed with their studies. These included managing time, delegation of tasks and placing priorities around studies. Sometimes respondents were forced to lower domestic standards and expectations, which often created a dilemma. Others looked for support from family, tutors, the student group and the workplace. A further strategy was around reducing working hours. The paper also attempted to look at the reason why the respondents dedicated themselves to study, overcoming many barriers. This was around respondents wanting a better future for themselves and their families. Respondents also comment on wanting a better career opportunity and increased income potential. Furthermore respondent’s motivation was linked with becoming roles models for their children and wanting to make their families proud. On balance they felt they might make short terms compromises for greater opportunity in the future. For further information about the research contact Joanne Smith and the University of Bolton; [js8@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:js8@bolton.ac.uk)