

**GRADUATE CERTIFICATE in
Consolidation of Social Work Practice
LEVEL 6 - 60 Credits
BMPF6044**

**LEARNER PORTFOLIO
(PORTH AGORED and UNIVERSITY OF
WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID)**

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Cohort: 18 onwards

Task 2

Observation Summary

Please include name of the expert witness observing in learner's details section of the portfolio.

Date of observation: 28/09/2023 _ _ _ _ _

Part A

Direct work was conducted with a child aged 9, after, having recently been placed on the child protective register due to the parent driving under the influence and causing a collision with the children in the car.

Informed consent was obtained from the parent and the child separately. The child's first language and preferred language is English however, if the child spoke Welsh at home or attended a Welsh school I would have utilised the 'Active Offer' offering him Welsh resources and the option of conducting the session with a Welsh speaking worker within the team in line with the Welsh Language Measure 2011 and the 'more than just words' framework (Welsh Government, 2012). When conducting any work with families we ensure they have our complaints procedures and data protection policy in line with GDPR and the Local Authorities policies.

The Child is from a single parent family, and the area is within the top 50 for Welsh Index Multiple Deprivation. Trussell Trust advises a 41% increase on food banks provided in Wales this year and the current cost of living crisis and energy poverty impacting many families also (Bevan Foundation, 2023; Trussell Trust, 2023; Welsh Government, 2022).

When conducting direct work with children the venue can be important, for this session we conducted the direct work within school which is a safe neutral place for the child. Consideration has been given to the ethical stand point of how the session and observation can impact the child. Positively I know the child and have a rapport built, the child is also

familiar with the observer which will lessen any potential impact (Beckett, Maynard & Jordan, 2017).

The purpose of the session was to better understand the child's wishes and feelings and to build on their knowledge of appropriate adult behaviour in regard to their understanding of the incident that led to them being placed on the register and to further explore their right to an independent advocate in line with the SSWBA 2014.

Word Count: 333

Part B

I completed the direct work session with the child while observed. I made a point of asking for the child's consent again and explained that the observer was there to watch me and would be writing notes about me; I recognised the impact of the observation and wanted to alleviate any worries the child might have about someone writing things down while they spoke. I did not write notes during this session and this is something I try to avoid where possible with children, if notes are needed I will explain what they are for (me needing to remember certain things etc.) I will also not shield my notes, and offer to go over what I have written to ensure I have captured things how they were intended, this I feel supports individuals we work with to feel respected, ensuring you are capturing their voice and also promotes working together (SCW, 2017). This will also build trust, showing honesty and accountability; all important aspects of social work practice and in line with the Code of Practice and social work values (Bisman, 2004; SCW, 2017; BASW, 2014). I also explained the feedback at the end, whereby the observer would ask questions.

This child new the observer so introductions were made in a friendly way. When working with children I adopt the PACE method (playful, acceptance, curiosity, empathy) I find this is most useful to gain trust and have open communication which is important to gather a child's wishes and feelings (Hughes & Baylin, 2012). It aligns with social work values, ethics and the code of practice such as, respect, empathy and promoting the voice of individuals in need of care and support (SCW, 2017).

I had formatted a feedback sheet that was more child friendly using emoji's and rewording some of the questions remaining person centred. The feedback form and the resource used during the direct work I had adapted to focus on the child's circumstances, and what they needed to address, recognising their experience and understanding of their life. Person centred approaches require an understanding of a person's situation as it is unique to them, (Adams, Dominelli, & Payne, 2017; Teater, 2014).

I referred to the Welsh Language Measure 2011 initially as it was not specifically relevant for this child that being said, it always informs my practice. As a Welsh learner (Dw'in dysgu Cymraeg) but not fluent speaker the 'active offer' is more than a, 'if I have a Welsh speaker I will offer them a Welsh speaking Social Worker' which is what the 'more than just words' programme tells us (Welsh Government, 2012a). It includes incorporating Welsh so it is as recognisable as English and treating it as the official language it is (Welsh Government, 2012b). I try to do what I can to make Welsh speakers feel comfortable and acknowledged. I have another child I'm working with currently who attends a Welsh school and we will say 'Bore da' and 'sut wyt ti?' I have also given them my phone number using Welsh. If I feel there is something that I am not getting across, I will ask what is the Welsh word for this and how does that translate back to English to ensure there is understanding and give them the opportunity to process it in their preferred language. These all add to the communication skills and competencies needed when working with individuals (Mantell, 2014; Schön, 2017).

Utilising Active listening skills is also crucial, often we state being a good listener as a skill but being an active listener includes elements of motivational interviewing techniques and paraphrasing back to show understanding. It also includes being attune to the feelings behind the words, to empathise and reflect back (Bodie, 2011; Teater, 2014;). Affirmations and praise were also utilised throughout the session, being specific within this to build self-esteem and a positive sense of self, important for children but also when working with adults (Teater, 2014).

When working with children, one of the most important things to ensure is the language we use. Much of social work terminology is not child friendly. Within the local authority I work, we utilise an 'outcomes' approach (SCW, 2020). Many children will not have heard of

outcomes and some of the adults we work with also, it is therefore important that this is explained and that we check for understanding. The resource I utilised during this direct work session was about 'bad habits', this was in relation to drugs and alcohol (it went over habits in general, good habits and bad). There was language within this that I explained, I also asked often, 'do you know what that means...can you explain it to me?' this ensures there is adequate understanding and promotes knowledge of the subject as we were able to expand on the current level of understanding.

Throughout the session there was evidence of the child's 'norms' and at times this needed to be challenged within wider contexts. Having an understanding of the people we work with and their lived experience is beneficial to communication and general social work practice (O'Loughlin & O'Loughlin, 2008). We often say we are not social engineers' however, we strive for social change for the benefit of the families we work with. This can be uncomfortable at times but is very much part of the skillset needed for social work practice, being able to challenge within evidence based practice in a way that still respects an individual's autonomy and rights (Mathews & Crawford, 2011).

Understanding the child's views may not mirror our own and how something is interpreted needs to be known, interpretation can be more important than the subject itself. This requires communication skills such as reflecting, asking open questions and being curious (Hughes & Baylin, 2012; Teater, 2014). Being self-aware is also relevant when working with individuals in a social work context. It is said that we pick up lots of our cues and communication non-verbally, being aware of our own reactions and responses during direct work is just as important as our verbal responses (Bodie, 2011). Aligning my own personal values with that of social work has been natural and barely a process, that being said, having an understanding of my preconceptions which may have grown since becoming a social worker is more challenging; identifying is key and why it is important that social work is not isolated, utilising peer/mentor support and supervision and multi-agency contexts can all benefit the families we work with (Howe & Gray, 2013; Thompson, 2010).

When reflecting on how the direct work went, I did achieve what I had set out to do, the child engaged well and appeared to enjoy the activity. However, it became noticeable that I was

losing the child's interest at around the 25 minute mark and if I were to do this again I would have shortened the length of the activity, I had tried to adapt what we were doing slightly to maintain focus and reduce the time taken where possible. This is very child specific some 9 year olds will be fine doing 30 plus minutes others require shorter periods of engagement. Being able to adapt is a skill that can support social work intervention with individuals, being able to pick up on body language and having emotional intelligence to read situations are all part of good communication skills (Knott & Scragg, 2007;). These skills, while naturally occurring for me, can be difficult at times, I don't always get it 'right' and I continue to develop them to aid my social work practice.

(Word Count: 1259)