

Using an appropriate model, critically reflect on your experiences whilst on placement. Your reflection should give a context for the placement and focus on at least three experiences in a way that demonstrates your ability to reflect effectively.

This reflective account will be discussing the time I spent on my 30 hour placement in a flying start creche. This account will be following a model and will be structured through the model of Gibbs, I chose this specific model as I felt it is appropriate to the situation and enables the account to address thoughts and feelings that were felt during this placement. This reflective piece will be referring to policy throughout, and will be focusing on events that took place during the time I spent on placement. During this reflective, personal account, as previously mentioned I shall be exploring it through the reflective cycle of Gibbs, therefore I shall be mentioning thoughts and feelings that were felt during the process, specific to the events that will be discussed. The account will also reflect on how the process will help for future development, and if I would have done anything differently. Also, following safeguarding and for child protection purposes, each individual mentioned in this account will be referred to as, for example, "Staff member A, Staff member B", "Child A, Child B", in replacement of their actual names.

As I will be using Gibbs as the chosen model to critically reflect on the placement, firstly I will be describing the experience as a whole (The University of Edinburgh, 2019).

I began my placement on January 29th 2020, which is a Welsh government funded programme which supports and offers a variety of services to children aged zero to three years old, and their families, in areas which are considered more deprived and this is determined by an individual's postcode (Family Information Centre Carmarthenshire, 2020). In particular, this placement was part of the childcare services, and this service is available to children aged two to three years old, and the parents of these children are entitled to free childcare for twelve and a half hours per week, which is worked out as two and a half hours, five days a week, with a maximum of eight children present per session. The focus and aim of the creche is to help to support the young children by ensuring they have the essential social and language skills in preparation to starting school the following year (Family Information Centre Carmarthenshire, 2020). Prior to beginning my placement, it was asked that I met with the manager of Plant Dewi for an interview, to go over paperwork, and it was required by them to see the DBS in person. During this interview, I had the opportunity to look over in person the Plant Dewi Child Protection Policy and Procedures, which is a 16 page document, which discusses a variety of things such as the principles that are important to the staff in Plant Dewi, which mentions that they follow the Welsh Government's Seven Core Aims for children in Wales, parents of the children must be respected, parents are entitled to support regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, culture, beliefs or lifestyle, and also that the welfare and safety of the children is the most important thing to those working in Plant Dewi (Plant Dewi Child Protection Policy and Procedures, 2017). The document also refers that the staff must practice their work in a way that safeguarding the children is always present. This goes on to discuss a variety of measures and legislation that the staff are required to follow (Plant Dewi Child Protection Policy and Procedures, 2017). Once the DBS was thoroughly checked, and paperwork was signed the date to begin placement was arranged.

On arrival at the placement, the staff were very welcoming and introduced me to all of the staff members and the children, who were all very polite and welcoming also. During the time I was on placement, it was a total of thirty hours, which had been split up into five hour sessions with a one hour break, which worked out to be six days, which I attended every wednesday. There were three

members of staff working in the creche directly with the children, who I met on the day I started placement. Staff member A was the play leader who essentially ran the creche, then staff member B was second in charge and finally Staff member C, who had previously been a volunteer in the creche but it was now their place of work. On arrival, Staff member A went over the Placement Risk Assessment that I had brought with me, and also went over the Student Placement Induction Checklist, which highlights the healthy and safety issues within the placement and also confirms in writing that I had been provided with this information. Staff member A also gave me the Plant Dewi Child Protection Policy and Procedures document which I had already seen during my interview, but had instructed that I keep this one to take home in order to read and reflect over it during my placement. Staff members A and B also mentioned that some of the children were involved with social services and to be aware of that. The staff in the creche like to ensure that routine is maintained, and follow a school setting routine, rather than a nursery setting. The staff would ensure all children had breakfast in the creche, sitting at the table, and would then take part in activities which encouraged their learning abilities, the activities would vary from playing with crafts, having a story read to the children by either Staff members B or C while using puppets, teaching the children through games and play, and spending a lot of time outdoors. The staff also liked to support the children creating different things to take home to their families. While I was there, my role was not just to observe but to partake in activities, such as reading stories to the children, supporting them with their craft making, supervising as they played outdoors with another staff member, preparing their drinks and snacks, generally being very involved.

There were a few experiences that took place throughout the placement, firstly a few incidents took place surrounding one of the children, who will be referred to as Child A during these accounts. Child A had not long joined the creche before I started placement. Child A had been diagnosed by a professional with severe autism when they turned two years old, and the child's Health Visitor believed it would be ideal for them to attend the creche to mix with others their age, and to give the mum a break. I met Child A on the first day of placement, and their mother had been instructed to bring them 15 minutes later than the usual time to begin, due to Child A's dislike of loud noise and disruption. I was told the same day that all three staff members did not have previous experience with children who have additional needs, and usually would need sufficient training to do so. Staff member C was however currently receiving training to be able to support Child A during their time in the creche and it was made known that they would require one to one support. Child A did appear to affect the other children while in the creche, as already mentioned they did not like loud or sudden noises, which is difficult to control in a setting with several two year olds. Child A was unable to speak like other children their age, and had been diagnosed with the mental age of a nine month old baby. Child A also had issues with their sight and was unable to see things from a far distance. Due to this, Child A would get very upset and angry when the other children made loud and sudden noises, which made it difficult for the other children to express themselves as they usually would, and had to be told to be quieter. Child A was also unable to partake in any of the usual activities that the other children would do, and wanted to be held most of the time, making it difficult to attempt to encourage them to partake in those activities. However, child A liked soothing sounds and bright colours, they also liked to touch and lick things that they could see and this was their way of expressing and understanding things, which I was told by staff member B, therefore one staff member at all times had to constantly be with Child A and amuse them during the session, while the other staff continued their session with the other seven children.

During another session, the staff members expressed their concerns regarding Child A's time in the creche to Plant Dewi and the health visitor, making it clear they believed there were other additional needs present not just autism, and they understood and made arrangements for an educational psychologist to come out to the creche to assess and observe Child A for the entire session. The educational psychologist concluded that she was unsure whether Child A had autism or not, and believed they had several other additional needs that needed to be acknowledged before making a decision on what the outcome would be before Child A begins school when they turn three.

There were another few experiences and incidents that took place during the placement, which surrounded another child who shall be referred to as Child B during this reflective account. Child B is currently involved with social services, and there is a history of reported neglect in his family. The family at the time were receiving support from a local family centre to help provide their children with clothing and shoes. I met child B during the first day of placement, and they were very happy and excited to be in the creche, following the creche rules and eager to learn and play. On arrival when the parents dropped Child B off, once they left, Child B would be checked for any visible marks, such as bruising or bumps, this would happen every time they attended creche, and they would often attend in damp clothes, which smelt of urine and were often soiled with urine or feces, and was not changed by the parents prior to attending creche. Each time, Staff members A or B would have to write a report when something was found such as marks, or if their clothes were soiled. During my placement, almost every time I was present Child B would have soiled clothes. Child B also had an ingrowing toe nail and it appeared to be infected and painful for them, Staff member B would then administer first aid treatment and write up a report on this. Staff member B also mentioned that both them and Staff member A were required to write a report on their feelings about whether Child B should remain involved with Social Services, as well keeping a close eye on the parents of Child B. This report would then be used in a Looked After Child (LAC) meeting, to support the decision making surrounding this situation (Surviving Safeguarding, 2017).

One particular incident did take place during the fifth day of placement, Staff member A was not present on this day as they were attending a meeting for Plant Dewi. On this day, the father of Child B had dropped them off fifteen minutes early. The father was unable to verbally communicate and explain why they were dropping Child B off early, and it was visibly clear he was struggling to stand up. The staff could smell alcohol from him and even on Child B, and suspected that the father had possibly been involved with drug use. When leaving, the father fell in the playground before getting back up and stumbling through the school gates. It was also very evident that Child B smelt strongly of urine, and had soiled their trousers before attending, however was not cleaned prior to coming to the creche, which meant staff members B and C had to clean him and dress him in fresh clothing before the other children arrived. The spare clothing in Child B's bag was also soiled, therefore had to have spare clothes from the creche. Staff member B was clearly distressed and concerned by the incident that had just taken place, and was unsure of what was the best action to take. Staff member B discussed the incident with both I and Staff member C, and considered child safeguarding concerns, thought the best action to take would be to call the assigned Health Visitor on guidance of what is the best action to take, and who will be referred to as Health Visitor A during the remainder of the reflective account. Health Visitor A guided Staff member B to get directly in touch with Social Services, as it was evident that the father was not in an appropriate state of health to collect Child B at the end of the session. It took Staff member B a few attempts to get through to Social Services, who eventually got back to Staff member B and had said that they had directly contacted Child B's father, who had now been requested to go for a meeting with Social Services that day to discuss the incident,

and that the child's mother would now be collecting them in the fathers place, so long as she was in a suitable state.

In this part of the reflection, I shall be reflecting on feelings and thoughts about the experience. The staff were very professional when I arrived for the first day, ensuring that the appropriate assessments were made and that I was informed on everything that I was required to be aware of. I felt very welcome on arrival, the children were happy to include me in what they were doing. Overall, the entire experience was enlightening and informative, spending time with the young children and supporting them in their learning journey was very rewarding. The experience with Child A was also rewarding, at first they appeared reluctant to be held or to interact with anyone they did not know, however after a few sessions we were forming a bond and they were happy when I held them, played with them outside and generally spent time with them. It was evident that Child A being there caused a little bit of stress for the staff, which is understanding considering they were not trained on how to interact in an educational setting with a child who has additional needs. I found it somewhat frustrating for the staff as there was a clear lack of communication and understanding on their part with the health visitor involved, they evidently needed more support in this, however did not receive it. It was a refreshing relief when the education psychologist was brought in, as I knew this would give the staff some clarity on what was best for Child A, however the results were not the desired ones, as the outcome was still unclear. Although, after spending time with Child A and becoming more clear on their likes and dislikes, Staff member A sat with Staff members B, C and I, to discuss ideas on what sort of things would benefit Child A. The conclusion of the meeting was to create a sensory room especially for Child A with soothing sounds, a mixture of colours and interactive toys for them to play with. This news was very welcomed by Child A's mother, and Staff member A was working on this room during my time in the creche. I feel personally that all three staff members put so much effort into caring for these children, ensuring they are all comfortable, happy and in a safe learning environment, it was inspiring to be around these individuals. I feel that they should have had more support in this particular area earlier on, especially considering they are not trained to care for children with additional needs, however their determination to ensure that Child A had as much as an equal opportunity to stay in the creche, while also succeeding there, was admirable to witness, and will be something I remember in the future when I may be working in situations that are similar to this.

The entire situation surrounding Child B was very different to the other children within the creche, as clearly stated above, their homelife and circumstances were different than several of the other children, and this child always had to be checked for marks when they arrived, and almost always was having to be changed into different clothes, whereas this was not the case for the rest of the children who attended the creche. It is difficult to maintain a professional outlook when witnessing and being around a child who is in these circumstances, and it is something that I personally found difficult to be around. In particular, the incident which took place regarding Child B's father was especially difficult and slightly uncomfortable, as it was clear that the staff were feeling uneasy at what had just happened also. I felt that the staff handled the situation as well as they could, following safeguarding procedures and directly getting in touch with social services to ensure that they were doing what was best for the child. It was also evident that they were following their guidelines, nevertheless it was clear to see they were genuinely concerned for the child's safety and welfare, and the bond they shared with Child B was easy for anyone to see. It was a little disappointing when social services did not come to access the situation for themselves, although they did reassure Staff member B that the father was now going

to see them directly for a meeting regarding the situation, and that the child's mother would collect them. It did take almost two hours for the staff to receive direct instructions on what was the best action to take from social services which caused a lot of stress and anxiety among the staff, considering the sessions are only two and a half hours long, not giving the staff much time to be made aware of what would be happening. During the placement, at first Child B was very reluctant and unsure when I approached them, and it took them a little while for them to get comfortable when I was around them. However, they began to open and I was able to see that they were just like any other two year old, wanting to play, learn and have fun with those around them. Child B did appear to want more comfort than the other children, wanting to be hugged frequently, seeking praise when they listened or did something right, and often liked to help the staff, unlike the other children who simply wanted to have fun. This I found surprising, as I had not seen many two year olds before who so desperately pursued praise from adults, wanting to see them happy with everything they did, perhaps this was due to them not receiving this type of praise and attention at home? When I questioned staff on this, they opened up easily and agreed that this was likely the reason they wanted their appraisal so much, and if that is the case, that in itself is hard to not feel sad about.

Although Child B was going through difficult circumstances at home, it was evident that the creche was their safe haven and thoroughly enjoyed being there, when arriving they would be full of smiles and eager to come in, enjoying every activity that they did and wanting to be a part of everything.

In this part of the reflection, I will be evaluating the experience, from both good and bad perspectives. Firstly, in my opinion, the experience as a whole had more good aspects to it than bad, the staff were undeniably welcoming, professional and cared deeply for the children that they took care of. I felt that they made it easy for me to settle in, always asking if I was alright and ensuring that whatever task I had been given that I was comfortable with. The staff had a very good routine and structure with the two year olds, and focused on each child as an individual, ensuring that they helped them in areas that were perhaps lacking or needed a bit more support, such as developing language skills, learning shapes, animals, colours and so on, which is clearly very good on their part. When I arrived to begin my placement, as well as receiving the Plant Dewi Child Protection Policy and Procedures document, I also received a statement on safeguarding, which is named Plant Dewi Safeguarding Statement. This statement is one page, and states that their safeguarding measures have been put into place to protect, and this goes for the staff, children, young people and their families, volunteers and carers who are all linked to Plant Dewi (Plant Dewi Safeguarding Statement, N.D). Some of the measures include that the welfare of the child, young person/vulnerable adult is of greatest importance, that protection from abuse is a human right, and finally, all suspicions and allegations are to be taken seriously, and responded to swiftly. There is also a statement of intent, which is a commitment to safeguard children linked to Plant Dewi from harm, and these include that all children have a right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, beliefs or disability, the welfare of the child is most important, and that there is a commitment to safe recruitment, vetting and selection (Plant Dewi Safeguarding Statement, N.D). It is clear that the staff are very committed to the measures that have been put in place, and ensuring that they are continuously followed. It is undoubtedly good that they are following these guidelines, and have their own safeguarding measures in place, which when studied, do coincide with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, 2014, promoting the well-being and safety of the children, and following the Child protection system in Wales, which in summary is to effectively work in a way that promotes the welfare of children and to also protect them (NSPCC Learning, 2020). The staff in the flying start creche have proved during the time I spent with them during placement that the safety and well-being of the children in their care is their number one

priority, with incidents like the one with Child B, they continuously ensure that the child is safe when in their care, and when they do have concerns, they respond to them efficiently and in an appropriate manner.

I am unable to find many bad experiences during the placement, other than the circumstances surrounding Child B, which is through no fault of the staff, is one of the only things that were sad and disheartening from the time I spent there. It was difficult knowing that Child B was at risk of further neglect, and knowing there is not much one can do to change this situation as social services were already heavily involved, however they still remained in their current situation. Regarding the staff, I never witnessed anything bad of them, they clearly cared deeply for these children. However, I do feel that although the Plant Dewi Safeguarding Statement states that all allegations and concerns of abuse or anything surrounding safeguarding concerns will be taken seriously and responded to appropriately, the day of the incident with Child B and their father, it was evident that the staff of the flying start creche felt disheartened and unhappy with the response and outcome they received from social services, as they had hoped for them to visit the creche to discuss it in person and possibly take further action if necessary (Plant Dewi Safeguarding Statement, N.D). However this statement applies to those linked to Plant Dewi, and Social Services are separate to this, however I thought the same or similar would apply. The staff had to see the parents of Child B five days a week, when collecting and dropping off their child, witnessing and assessing their behaviour each time, in order to make a report that truly stated what they were like during these times and whether in their opinion they felt the parents were stable enough to care for their children without the support of social services. They were the ones who got to witness it all first hand, and actually spent a lot of time with Child B, slowly seeing the signs of neglect and not improving. When the incident with Child B's father happened, as already mentioned, it clearly upset the staff and caused great concern, therefore when social services did not even come out to see the staff or to physically see Child B, having mentioned to them he had once again come to creche in dirty, and in damp, soiled clothes, and to fully understand the importance of the situation, it is understandable that they felt perhaps let down by the response and lack of attentiveness to the circumstances. This would be the only situation that I would be able to note anything that I considered to be bad during the experience.

Next, I will be making an analysis to make sense of the situation. As previously mentioned, I found the incident with Child B and their father difficult to comprehend and for the way that social services dealt with it on their end. It is evident that I felt that social services handled the situation rather poorly on their end. Letting the staff know the outcome close to the time that the creche was closing, knowing that the staff had to follow safeguarding procedures and felt uncomfortable not knowing what to do, it felt a little discourteous and simply handled in the way it should have been, considering social services were already well aware of Child B's current situation. The staff in the creche were also visibly upset by the incident and perhaps needed to try to not allow their emotions to cloud their judgement, however, this is easier said than done. Upon reflection, social services clearly have their own guidelines and procedures they need to follow, before taking drastic measures. There was already an up and coming LAC meeting to review Child B's current situation, therefore the matter surrounding this child was clearly being taken seriously and was paramount, however this incident did come across as though it was perhaps a slight nuisance to social services as it was shocking to see that barely anything was being done to ensure that the parents were fit to collect Child B that day. The staff wanted them to come out to see Child B's mum as well as the dad, to assess if she was in a fit position to collect them. It was hard to comprehend how this was not considered, and that Child B would be going home to that situation even when social services had been contacted once again.

Regarding Child A, the situation surrounding them could be considered in two ways, that it was unsuitable for them to be in the creche, or that they too should receive equal opportunities and have the chance to be there like any other child. This is something I have contemplated, and can see both sides. For instance, it was evident during the time I spent at the creche that Child A's presence had altered the routine that was usually upheld. The children were having to be quieter, unable to play with Child B as they would cry when they heard too much noise and simply were unable to interact like most two year olds. Not only did this situation seem to stress the staff, but Child A seemed stressed and unhappy to be there. Even with the Educational Psychologist coming out to see them, it created more questions than answers, leaving the staff to wonder further what they should do. However, having contributed to the idea of creating a sensory room for Child A, this seemed to put the staff's mind at ease as they finally had a small solution to making Child A more comfortable there, ensuring they had the same chance as the other children advancing their skills, however this meant that Child A would be in a separate environment to the other children, not socialising with them as the Health visitor had hoped, and simply not learning at the same level. Therefore, perhaps it could be determined that this was not the appropriate place for Child A to be to fully thrive and to benefit them, although it goes without saying that the staff were trying their best to ensure that Child A had the best outcome from this situation. Although, this could further support the Equality Act 2010, which states that no one should be discriminated against, including their disability not just in the workplace but in wider society, and should still be able to achieve equality and the same opportunities as anyone else (GOV, n.d).

I will now be making a conclusion about what has been learnt, and what I could have done differently during this experience. Undoubtedly, this experience has altered the view and perception I had previously had of working with children who are involved with social services. It is much more challenging and affects your emotions a lot more than I had previously thought that it would. While maintaining boundaries is easy, it is still upsetting to see a child be neglected, while knowing you are not in a position to alter the circumstances. In a situation like this, not much more can be done to make it better, only what one can control, such as continuing to make Child B's time in the creche as enjoyable as possible and an escape from the reality they face at home. In regards to what I could have done to alter this, there is not much. However, the incident did upset me and I made the decision to tell the lecturer on the course I study what had happened, and also mentioned that social services were already involved, therefore I could not do more than had already been done. To handle situations similar to this in the future, I think it is important that I am more aware of the protocols that are in place to deal with these incidents, and to remain calm while doing so.

This is the final part of the reflection, and in this part I shall be going over an action plan for how I would deal with something like this in the future, or any changes that I feel would be appropriate. In both situations regarding Child A and Child B, I felt as a student, I did my best considering both situations were challenging and difficult at times. Regarding the situation with Child A, I did everything to the best of my ability and spent as much time as possible with them, ensuring that the other staff were able to continue with their usual jobs and I also spent time with the other children ensuring they still had plenty of attention and still got to do their activities while Staff members A, B or C would spent time with Child A when they were very distressed. I am pleased that I was included when the staff were thinking of ways to improve Child A's situation, and that my thoughts and contributions were considered by them.

Regarding Child B, that was a lot more challenging and I feel all involved in the incident who worked in the creche did their best every time signs of neglect were revealed and with the incident surrounding Child B's father. In future, if placed in a similar situation, I would like to be more aware of policy and procedures that would need to be considered during a situation like that so I would be able to help more with advice and guidance, however when the incident occurred I tried to remain calm and follow what the staff guided me to do, helping to occupy Child B so they were not aware of what was going on, and so that they were not distracted by the phone calls that were taking place. It was not an incident I was expecting to be presented with, however I do feel that I have learnt from it and how in future it will be better to be prepared by ensuring one is knowledgeable on the safeguarding procedures that are required in that situation, and also to speak up if one feels something is not right.

Word count: 5439 words.

Reference list:

Equality Act 2010. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance> (Accessed: 26th July 2020).

Family Information Service Carmarthenshire (2020) *Childcare Service*. Available at: <https://fis.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/flying-start/flying-start-childcare-service/> (Accessed: 20th July 2020).

Family Information Service Carmarthenshire (2020) *Flying Start*. Available at; <https://fis.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/flying-start/> (Accessed: 20th July 2020).

NSPCC Learning (2020) *Child protection system in Wales*. Available at: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/wales#:~:text=In%20Wales%20the%20child%20protection,emotional%20or%20psychological%20abuse> (Accessed: 24th July 2020).

PLANT DEWI CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES 2017, c.1. (Accessed: 17th July, 2020).

Plant Dewi Safeguarding Statement, N.D, c.1 (Accessed: 17th July 2020).

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, c. 2. Available at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/section/1> (Accessed: 24th July 2020).

Surviving Safeguarding (2017) *Looked After Child Meeting (LAC)*. Available at:
<http://survivingsafeguarding.co.uk/looked-after-child-meeting-lac/> (Accessed: 26th July 2020).

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH (2019) *Gibbs' reflective cycle*. Available at:
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/gibbs-reflective-cycle>
(Accessed: 20th July 2020).