

Reflective log

The activity I chose to conduct was a Christmas reindeer cupcake baking activity. The activity was conducted with groups of six, 4-5 year olds. This firstly involved the group to gather the ingredients that they would need from an ingredients list. After all the ingredients were collected the group and I began making vanilla sponge cupcakes, once they were cooked and cooled we then began decorating the top with chocolate butter cream icing and adding two salted pretzels in representation of the antlers, then adding a red smartie for the nose and two sweet eyes to complete the face.

The aim of this activity was to develop the children's skills, values and knowledge whilst having fun and following the Welsh assembly governments (2016) guidelines with links to foundation phase curriculum of communication, planning, reflecting, designing and making.

I took on the role of the leader of the group to lead the group through the activity to ensure safety and enjoyment for all children.

I felt this activity had many positive aspects for all children, this activity gave the children the opportunity to feel a sense of self-esteem and accomplishment once they had completed making and decorating their cupcakes. Throughout this activity I felt that all children were completely engaged in the activity which I feel was a positive aspect as it is difficult to keep children at the ages of 4-5 completely engaged in something for a period of time.

Another positive aspect of this activity is that all children seemed to really enjoy the activity which I gained from the positive feedback from the children.

This activity helped the children explore their senses through the numerous aromas whilst mixing the ingredients and the children has the opportunity feel and describe how the flour felt before it was sifted and if the eggs were cold or warm before cracking them into the bowl. This activity helped to demonstrate and develop many of the children's skills, the first being demonstrated and developed is good bilateral coordination skills, these skills will help the children in the future with tasks such as tying shoelaces, cutting with scissors and drawing a line with a ruler. Tasks such as sifting flour into bowls had a positive aspect with the development of the children's bilateral coordination skills also, as this helps train the children to use one hand as a support while their other hand holds the heavy sift of flour and does the heavy work which is supported by the research by Pathways (2019).

Another skill demonstrated in this activity is the development and practice of the children's hand eye coordination, this was demonstrated when the children were tasked with pouring ingredient into the bowl and pouring the batter into the cupcake tins. Even decorating the top

of the cupcakes with icing helping to develop the children's hand eye co-ordination. This activity involved the children following a simple recipe with verbal guidance from myself, I found this was a positive aspect of the activity as this required the children to have to listen and follow instructions that were given to them, this ultimately helps to boost the children's listening and sequencing skills. This also helped to develop the children's language skills by using words that they may not come across as often, with words such as ounces and grams. By following a recipe, the children had the task of gathering all the ingredients that they will need this was in a sense like having a shopping list, this aspect helped to develop the children's emergent literacy which I found research supporting this by Growing Minds (2019).

It also helped the children to learn the valuable life skill of patience, this was learnt when the children had to wait whilst the cupcakes were cooking and had to wait whilst the cupcakes were completely cool before they could decorate.

Through this activity the children got to work on their gross motor skills as every child had their own turn at mixing all the ingredients together which tasked the children to have to hold the bowl steady whilst mixing it all together which sometimes can be a difficult and strenuous task.

I felt this baking activity gave the children opportunities to strengthen their hand and finger muscles, by tasks such as spreading icing, or squeezing the icing from the icing bag. These tasks even helped to develop the much needed skill of the tripod fingers, which is an important skill when the children hold pen and pencils.

I felt that the children demonstrated many values throughout this activity the main value demonstrated was to be non-judgemental to other children especially when it came to decorating the cupcakes because not every child found it an easy task.

This baking activity also exposed them to the concepts of math in real life with tasks such as measuring out the flour and milk content or counting how many eggs we will need for the activity.

During this activity the children gained the useful knowledge of learning how to read and follow along to a recipe this is useful knowledge to have and can benefit them throughout their lives according to Gavin (2018).

Throughout this activity I did face some challenges, the main challenge I faced was the group size. Due to the activity being a baking activity involving numerous ingredients and the children having to follow a recipe along with verbal instructions, I felt this group size may

have been too large, however if the group were to be even smaller this would have meant an increase in time it would have taken to complete this activity with every child in the class. Due to the large group size it meant I needed more support off other teachers and practitioners to ensure safety meaning others had to take time out of their day to help with this activity.

Another challenge I faced was the timing of everything, due to the size of the class and the limited hours in a school day to get every group to bake was a prominent challenge.

If I was to do this activity again I would most likely change the group sizes so there would be less children doing it at one time, so the activity would be much calmer and not so crowded. I would also gain more support off other practitioners during the activity, so every child could get the attention and help that they needed throughout this activity especially the children in the class with additional learning needs.

Briefing paper

The aim of this portfolio is for the benefit of early years practitioner to discuss the importance of reflective practice as a means of maintaining quality services for young children.

Reflective practice is a way of focusing on your own experience and practice in order to improve the way you work according to Bright Knowledge (2018). Dewey proposed that the action of reflection consists of turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious thought (1933). Hatton and Smith (1995) also defined reflective practice as the deliberately thinking about action with a view to improve. Indeed, it has been suggested that reflecting from professional experiences, rather than learning from formal teaching, may be the most important source of personal professional development and improvement (Jasper, 2003).

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is defined by the foundation for critical thinking (2017) as a self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. Critical thinking is the thinking about any subject or problem. Critical thinking enables the practitioner to improve the quality of their thinking by skilfully analysing, assessing and reconstructing it.

As identified by Halpern (1996) critical thinking is a key element of reflective practice as it is important during the process of analysing and making judgements about what has happened.

According to Argyris & Schön, (1978); Boud & Walker, (1998) and agreed with by Epstein & Hundert, (2002) continual critical thinking during reflective practice can close the gap between theory and practice, along with improving the quality of service, care and stimulate personal and professional development.

Honesty

The University of Ireland Galway (2018) states that honesty is highly required during reflection. Atkins & Murphy, (1994) state that being completely honest about yourself can be one of the most difficult parts of the reflective process whether it be about the positives or negatives. Atkins & Murphy, (1994) state how it is important to be as honest as possible about your achievements, your failures, your strengths, and your weaknesses.

Atkins & Murphy, (1994) states that reflective practice requires honesty as they believe a dishonest reflection is useless and poses no purpose in aiding development or improvement. The Professional association for childcare and early years (PACEY) (2016) states that a reflective practitioner should be able to reflect honestly about their strengths and weaknesses in order to improve and develop. PACEY (2016) believes that by being honest during your reflection will over time support the practitioner in becoming more confidence in their practice.

Objectivity

The University of Ireland Galway (2018) believe that during the reflective process it is important to consider personal beliefs, behaviours and actions objectively. However, some find it difficult to think about themselves objectively, so The University of Ireland Galway (2018) suggests some ways to aid objectivity whilst reflecting:

- Thinking in the third person by writing about yourself as if you were observing someone else's behaviour, actions and responses.
- Keeping a daily record or journal of the experiences that you can reflect on during and after the experiences.
- By asking yourself questions that can be easily reflected on.

Gibbs reflective cycle (1988)

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle was developed by Graham Gibbs in 1988 and published in the article 'learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods' in 1988. Gibbs' reflective cycle encourages you to think systematically about the phases of an experience or activity according to Oxford Brookes University (2019).

The University of Edinburgh (2019) states that Gibbs reflective cycle (1998) helps to give structure to learning from experiences as it offers a framework for examining experiences and allowing you to learn and plan from things that either went well or didn't go well.

Gibbs cycle is formulated of 6 simple steps these are

1. Description of the activity or experience
2. Thoughts and feelings about the experience
3. Evaluation of the positive and negatives of the experience
4. Analysis what sense can you make of the experience
5. Conclusion what else could have been done differently
6. Action plan what will happen differently next time.

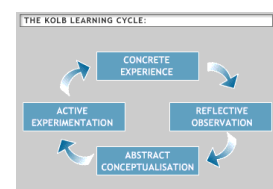


Source Oxford Brookes University (2018)

Kolb reflective cycle (1984)

David A Kolb published his book entitled 'experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development'. Kolb in his book explains how practitioners learn best through life experiences. Kolb's (1984) developed a four stage cycle which was referred to as 'reflective observation', the stages consist of

- First the experience
- Second, he reflection to think about what was done,
- Third conceptualise to generate a hypothesis about the meaning of the experience
- Lastly plan to adopt the hypotheses and learn from these experiences.



Source University of Leicester (No Date)

PACEY (2016)

Professional association for childcare and early years (PACEY) (2016) states that reflective practice is an important aspect of maintain and developing not only a quality of practice but a quality service for children.

PACEY (2016) states that reflective practice benefits the parents as well as the children as they will be able to see the changes in your practice. This will ultimately raise the parent's confidence in your care and the quality of the practice whilst it is constantly improving. PACEY (2016) highlights key elements that early years setting should be providing to execute a quality service:

- All staff should have a range of relevant qualifications in order to provide a high quality of care and opportunities these could include First aid and childcare qualifications
- All staff to provide an up to date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)
- All staff must provide a safe hygienic environment
- Positive interaction with plenty of praise and encouragement

PACEY (2016) states that Continually reflecting on your practice will help you to:

- Enhance your skills
- Improving confidence and motivation
- Helps to focus on and take ownership of your practice
- Identify professional development needs
- Supports you to set targets

PACEY (2016) believes that reflection helps to improve setting and make practitioners more efficient.

Flying start (2014)

The flying start initiative (2014) is the centrepiece of services to provide good quality childcare for children. The quality childcare provision focuses on children from disadvantaged backgrounds and aims to improve their preparation for school.

Selleck and Griffin (1996) believed that "Education and care are inextricably linked. Quality care is educational, and quality education is caring."

It has been found that in many countries especially in European countries it is now recognised that childcare and education need to work together in quality services to benefit the educational development of children.

The flying start initiative states some principles that are highly important in providing good quality services for all children these were discovered by doing intense reflection on all flying start settings to ensure ongoing quality of service for children. Some of these are:

- Remembering that all children enter settings as individuals with different experiences and stages of developments, it is important that practitioners do not categorise children and treat all as equals.
- All staff should be well trained and qualified to be working with children.
- To provide a stimulating environment which consists of both indoor and outdoor learning, which must also be safe and secure which is also agreed with by the outdoor learning wales (2019)

The Flying Start initiative aims, therefore, to provide both early years care and education and to develop a strong partnership with families and other services that cater for young children, such as health.

Estyn (2014)

Estyn (2014) found that to provide an ongoing high quality and effective services for children, there should always be an ongoing commitment to learning, reflective practice and professional development from all practitioners. Estyn (2014) highlights that reflective practice within settings helps to provide a common goal for improvement within settings, therefore Estyn believes it is important to have regular visits to see bench marks and areas for improvements for not only individual practitioners but the setting as a whole. Estyn (2014) indicates that reflection and discussion on specific areas of practice such as communication or patience are the preferred approach for settings to provide and keep a high quality services for children.

Estyn (2014) believes that reflective practice and critical reflection are combined and important as reflection should be in-depth and as honest as possible when reflecting specially when wanting to develop professional networks and development for quality services.

Estyn (2014) highlights that for practitioners to improve their professional development then there needs to be high quality feedback which is tailored and constructive, this is especially important when reflecting to gain another opinion and view this will help to develop and maintain a high quality service for children as the feedback and reflection will help aid improvement.

Summary

In summary it is clear to see that PACEY, Estyn and Flying start all agree that to have a good quality of services for young children the reflective practice must be adhered which follows the work of Schon (1983) as he spoke of reflection as a complement to our knowledge and development, especially practitioners who can enhance the services for children.

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Area for further development (provide further details)	Why?	How?	Who/Where?
1. To gain a B or higher grade in GCSE Maths	To have the appropriate requirements to go onto do my PGCE course or a first teach course. This will give me more opportunities and qualifications to gain jobs in the future.	A higher level GCSE maths course.	Bridgend college Wednesday evenings 5:30-8:30 Cost -£250 (Including exam fees) Pencoed College Thursday evenings 5:30-8:30 Cost £250 (Including exam fees)
2. To increase my personal experiences	To gain a broader knowledge on different experience of situations and how to effectively deal with a broader range of situations.	By assisting in numerous different settings with different staff and children.	By applying for places with Places such as Apollo teaching who place you in different setting each week to gain more experience working in different settings, with different staff and children as every setting is different.
3. To learn sign language	To enable myself to broaden my communication skills to all children and staff that I may work with in the future.	By completing a sign language course	Bridgend college – Thursday evenings 5:30-8:30 Cost- £200 Pencoed College Tuesday evenings 5:30-8:30 Cost- £200
4. To gain confidence in myself and my teaching ability	To be more professional and to be confidence in myself that I know what to do in challenging and unknown situation with confidence and stress free.	To accept that mistakes are inevitable especially when doing something new. Asking for advice from experienced staff who can give me valuable knowledge which I can use in future situations.	To be prepared for any circumstance, and plan for every situation that could arise within a setting.
5. Patience	To have better patience when working with others, especially in a classroom situation and to try and stay calm in stressful situations.	To be mindful of the thing that make me impatient and to learn to manage my emotions better through advice from other	Within a teaching setting with and experienced staff.

		practitioners and through my own learning.	
6. To be non-judgmental	So, I can accept everyone's situation without casting judgement whether that be staff, children or parents. And to also keep my own views and opinions to myself in any situation.	To accept people with whom I disagree with by asking other practitioners how they deal with situations and taking on board and valuable knowledge and advice.	Within a teaching setting with and experienced staff.
7. Communication skills	So that I can remember to pass on any important or relevant information about a child to parents, teachers or other authorities.	To remember how important it is to pass on any information about a child that I deem to be important and asking a second opinion to see if the information is relevant or not.	Within a teaching setting with and experienced staff.

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