

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.com/>) on 18th July 2026 to proofread my work. Using the prompt:

1. Please proofread this work, focussing on spelling and grammar accuracy as well as formal writing.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Play session reflection.

For the purpose of this reflection, I will be using Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) as a guide as it provides a clear and structured approach to reflecting on my professional practice. As the structure of Gibbs reflective cycle allows for the consideration of thoughts and feelings, evaluating what went well and what could be improved and identifying actions for future practice, this makes it relevant when reflecting on the play session. This reflection will evaluate the planning and delivery of the play session as well as reviewing the effectiveness of the activities in promoting well being for the participants through therapeutic play and nature-based experiences.

The aim of the session was to help children identify thoughts and emotions, encouraging emotional expression through symbolic play as well as promoting emotional regulation using nature. The participants were teenage boys who volunteered to act as children for purpose of the session. As the participants were teenagers, permission was gained for them to take part and to be filmed for the video.

The location of the video had to be changed due to the current weather conditions. The original plan was to build the origami boats in the outdoor environment as well, however due to the heat and not wanting the participants to overheat and become unwell, this was moved to an indoor environment for their safety and comfort. The nature walk and the releasing of the boats was able to happen outside allowing for exploration in the natural environment.

For the session there were three key activities planned. First was an introduction to the session, checking in on the participants, this was followed by their first activity which was building an origami boat and decorating it with their thought and feelings, what they

liked and of what they were proud. The second task was then to complete the nature walk, looking for natural items to put in their boats that made them feel different emotions, something that represented how they were feeling or just items of interest to them. Finally, the participants are to launch their boats onto the stream, symbolising the release of emotions, this was then followed by a check out of the session, checking on the participants wellbeing after the activities. The total time for the session was around 15 mins.

Before the session I was feeling nervous, this was partly because of the weather conditions meaning that the making of the boats needed to be moved to an indoor location for the participants comfort, and also as I was unsure if the participants were going to engage in the symbolic nature of this activity, with them being teenagers acting as children for the session. During the session, I was able to relax and enjoy the experience. It quickly became apparent that I made the right decision in moving the boat building to an indoor environment as the weather at the time was simply too warm and would have put the participants at unnecessary risk of heat stroke, I was also able to enjoy the session with the participants as they were fully engaged in the session and were enjoying themselves, this was a big relief for me, especially seeing them engage with nature in the outdoor environment. Following the session, I was able to reflect and recognise areas that could have been improved however I was pleased with how the session flowed and engaged the participants.

There were several aspects of the session that I felt worked particularly well, especially for the participants that I had. Firstly, the activity of making the boats, this was more time consuming than I had originally planned for as the boats were more challenging for

the participants than expected, however the activity was enjoyed and the symbolism of filling the boats worked well. If I were to do the session again, I would like to do the building of the boats in the natural environment, but due to weather conditions it was safer and more comfortable for this activity to take place in an indoor environment.

Taking the participants into the natural environment was successful for this activity and the participants displayed good engagement with this aspect of the activity. The participants did well finding objects that were of interest to them and that they could link to different emotions, but the participants were also able to gain more from the sensory aspect of the activity than I had originally expected. The participants made comments about the smell of different plants, the feeling of different leaves and the looks of the natural environment.

What could have been improved in the session from myself would be the time management of the session. There were changes to the location for the boat making which added additional time to the task, but I also did not leave enough time for exploration of the natural environment and the engagement of the participants. I would have also extended the time for discussion as parts of the discussion felt rushed and I would have liked to have given the participants more time to think and also to expand on their answers if they wished.

It has been stated that play has a positive benefit for children (Prins, et al, 2022) with Johnstone et al (2022) taking it one step further by suggesting that access to nature may be particularly beneficial to a child's emotional wellbeing, overall mental health, and improve self-esteem, resilience and helps a child to manage stress. This links well to the activities from the session, with the aim of the session based on the promotion of

emotional regulation through nature. There is also the theory that nature acts as a 'co-therapist' when taking part in therapeutic play sessions in nature by supporting the development of self-esteem, self-efficacy and resilience, this can be seen in the play session through the participants willingness to engage in the natural environment, more than what was originally expected (Courtney, 2022). This is supported by Harper, Rose and Segal (2019) who describes to collaborative relationship with nature and the healing effects that it can have on a persons physical and mental health. It is for these reasons that the session based in the natural environment worked well meeting the aims of the session.

Through the planning of the session, it was important to me to take the participants on a journey, from building and decorating the boats to releasing them as a symbolic action of letting go of emotions, I believe that the natural environment enhanced the experience of this activity and elevated the therapeutic value from it being a play session to a session that invoked thoughts and emotions and had a theme running through the activities. The activities set displayed how symbolic play and nature exploration can support emotional expression but also from a planning perspective it also highlighted the importance of time management in these sessions and allowing more time than expected for self-expression, discussion and for activities. Although the activity was designed to help children express and let go of their thoughts and feelings, it is important to recognise that every child is different and may respond in different ways. While some children may find releasing their boat into the stream a positive and meaningful experience, others may not feel comfortable letting it go, especially if they have experienced grief, loss, or trauma. In these situations, it may be more appropriate to give children the choice to keep their boat instead. This highlights the importance of

adapting therapeutic play to meet each child's individual needs, rather than assuming the same approach will work for everyone.

If I were to do this activity again, I would be more prepared for the weather conditions so that portion of the session could still take part in the natural environment as I feel, especially on reflection, that this would have enhances the session more. For future session I would be better prepared for all weather conditions in order to make the participants comfortable.

References

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