

Reflection presentation.

Good morning everyone, and welcome to my presentation. To start I will just share a little about myself and give you an insight into my positionality.

My name is Hannah Newman and I am HLTA, a mum of four preteen and teenagers with a passion for the early years, the outdoors, Froebel and supporting children with speech, language and communication difficulties. I currently work in a setting which is situated in an area of deprivation with high FSM rate.

I have recently completed my Early Years education and care degree with UWTSD, which has fuelled my love for professional learning and shown me that I am capable of achieving academically. I am keen to continue my professional learning on this Masters degree with you all.

Some information about my influences:

Working with children has always been my goal, as I have been fortunate enough to be supported by some kind, caring and empowering people throughout my childhood and into my adulthood, who have inspired me to want to be my best self and work supporting children myself.

Welsh Government (2023) and Estyn (2023) explains that practitioners should inspire **all** children to achieve academic success regardless of their economic background.

I felt the impact of such a person in my primary school years, I was supported by a wonderful teacher despite being from a deprived area, and a broken family living off state benefits due to my mum becoming ill whilst I was a child.

When considering Welsh Government (2022) I can see that as a child I was brought up in a home which would be considered as 'living in poverty'.

Despite this, my mum and my teacher always seemed to support me to achieve my best. I attended a Welsh language primary school, despite being from an English speaking home.

I distinctly recall my teacher being supportive of not only me but my mum too, even after I was no longer a pupil in her class and in fact even long after, whilst I was in comprehensive school, and still to this day.

This trusting relationship that my teacher built with us has had a powerful influence on my life. From supporting my mum as she was poorly, and again when my father left the family home and supporting my parents to help me with my Welsh as neither of them spoke the language.

Birth to 5 matters (no date), Welsh Government (2024) and Estyn (2019) supports the importance of building relationships with parents and carers to ensure children reach their highest potential.

My teacher instilled a passion in me to also educate and be a supportive practitioner, and I enjoy doing so in my current role, despite the frequent challenging behaviour and poor parental engagement due to the culture of the community.

This brings to mind the importance of placing the child central to all, and the roles of supportive parents, educators and other services around the child as described in Bronfenbrenner (1996) with the ecological systems theory.

My experience is evidence of the need for those relationships between the microsystem around the child, which is described as the mesosystem.

I have also been fortunate to have colleagues and professionals supporting and influencing my career in education and care. While working as a childminder I had a fabulous, passionate, childcare advisor and an inspirational and supportive CIW inspector.

They encouraged me to complete my CCLD level 3 and other professional learning, eventually gaining the courage to take the leap into working in a school setting and from there meeting the head teacher who encouraged me to complete my Early Years degree and consider a path into teaching.

During this time I was inspired by the lecturers' teachings around Froebel.

I grew to realise that Froebel's principles align with my own values and how I remember making connections and learning as a child and the way I brought up my children: learning by doing during play, in real life contexts, making mistakes and being outdoors and importantly those relationships with trusted adults (Tovey, 2020).

I have accessed professional learning workshops and webinars and visited Froebel best practice settings since beginning my degree.

Moreover, these principles align well with the curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings (Welsh Government, 2024) which is a document that informs my practice within my setting and ensures that professionals build trusting relationships with adults who support learning and value the outdoors ensuring the children make links with nature.

What has lead me here?

Looking back on my journey here, my life has been a little back to front to what would be considered the conventional learning route, in that first came becoming a wife and mother and then I returned to work for a few years before summoning the courage to return to the classroom.

Despite always wanting to be a teacher, as a result of having a very caring teacher throughout my primary years, I never had the confidence to think that I could achieve this. I attempted university, straight after sixth form, as is the normal course of learning.

However, I found this transition really quite difficult and found that I had dropped out before the end of the first term.

My parents were not in the position to financially support me through university and so I accessed the student loans offered, however I felt that I couldn't continue with a course that I wasn't enjoying when I knew how much debt this was causing.

Additionally, I was having to pay rent to uni and then moving back to my parents, I was aware that this was a financial burden for them so began working and paying them rent.

This meant that I never fully felt comfortable returning to uni which would have meant stopping supporting the family home again. This is something discussed in Khan (2024) who explains that this is one way that poverty can impact on higher education students more so than those who do not come from a disadvantaged household.

Reflecting on this experience, I definitely placed a lot of pressure on myself at the time, being the only one of my siblings and close family to attempt university. In fact, it wasn't really common place for people in my neighbourhood to attend university.

With all that said, having children of my own, I found myself wanting to show them that employment, education and supporting your own family was an important value to me.

I know that my mum and step dad would have both been working, if they could have. That it was just misfortune that my mum became ill and my step dad had to leave work to care for her.

However, I also felt that I needed to show my children the importance of hard work and finding your place in society. Although I still had no confidence to follow my dreams of teaching.

One day, by some circumstances related to my husband's work, I discovered that our local school needed volunteers and my husband had enlisted me. I knew that that was my place, that I could make a difference to someone in the same way that my teacher had influenced me.

After having my 4th child, when she was 3 years old, and with the encouragement of a good friend, I began childminding and educating myself at home while continuing to volunteer at other schools.

Once Childminding I really felt like I had found my place, I began taking part in council led professional learning, which according to Siraj, Kingston and Neilsen-Hewett (2019) is important to become a quality childcare professional.

I found the Welsh Language again through a training course I attended called Ffa, la, la... and I began using it within my childminding setting.

I then completed my CCLD level 3, as I previously mentioned with the encouragement of my childcare advisor, which opened up school settings as a place of employment.

But I knew that I wasn't finished learning, and when I finally got a job in the setting I currently work in, the head teacher introduced me to the professional standards for assisting teaching.

I knew I wanted to work towards my HLTA status, even though this was out of my comfort zone.

Once I had completed that, with her support, praise and encouragement, I applied, very last minute, to do my degree.

This was as a result of being poorly and thinking about what I really want in life.

Again, to me this shows the importance of relationships in development and Bronfenbrenner's theory of supportive guidance in your microsystem, even as you grow older!

Moving forward:

As I said at the beginning of my presentation, I want to continue to learn throughout this masters and I would like this experience to help me to become better equipped to support more families in my setting.

I want to use the learning from my masters to continue to set up my support group based in our newly installed community kitchen.

I hope that this group will support families in the immediate area surrounding the setting to appreciate the importance of communicating with their children (NSPCC, no date and Welsh Government, no date).

In addition to this, I hope that this group will offer a safe place, support and guidance to families, and become a place to access advice and signposting and create those trusting relationships to ensure the children reach their full potential. Giving back what I received myself.

Moreover, this group will be a place that the families who attend can access warmth and a hot drink and a snack for free, with no judgement or stigma to support those who maybe can not afford to put on their heating.

This is also supported by Estyn (2020), who argue that schools who work collaboratively with families, offering educational sessions, support groups and have other services available on site, often bridge the gap to educational success for those living in poverty.

In the process of doing this I hope to learn new skills such as creating action plans, reaching out to and collaborating with more outside agencies, creating networks, which according to Khan (2024) can be a barrier to progression for those who have been raised in poverty.

I also hope that this will be beneficial to the school, supporting early language will hopefully see better progress in literacy and writing as these children move through the school (Department for Education, 2024) which will help with our setting's next inspection as well.

I will do this by collaborating with the family liaison, having professional discussions with the outside agencies I already have contacts with through their work with children in my setting, to seek support and signposting and accessing any professional learning available.

This is a process I have in fact already started since beginning my masters, I sought advice from a speech and language therapist and have since held a meeting where they offered a lot of guidance.

I wish to also gain a better understanding of children's speech development through this process. I will access advice and guidance from the Early Language team that I have already reached out to. They are very excited by the plans I have made so far, in collaboration with the family liaison at my setting.

There are many other community projects which could be run alongside this for instance Multiply and Big Box Bwyd and I hope that I can be instrumental in getting these things set up in our setting.

Additionally, I would love to be able to expand on this and provide sessions in our forest school too, if finance and time allows, to support families to make connections with nature with their children and their development (Tovey, 2020).

I feel this will be beneficial, especially in our area to enable families who can't afford to access activities such as den building that would be offered at clubs and activity centres but may also be unsure of doing these on their own.

Reflecting on this I can see that clearly, my teacher not only instilled a love for supporting and a desire to become a teacher but also the values of continuously learning.

The degree opened my mind, my heart and empowered me more than anything else I have done to reflect and take account of the fact that I am capable, I am a quality early years professional, I care and want to support the families in my setting, something that is important as an educational professional (Gov.uk, 2024, Estyn, 2019 and Siraj, Kingston and Neilsen-Hewett, 2019).

I hope you've enjoyed my reflection.

Are there any questions?

