

8<sup>th</sup> Call for Student Papers: June 2020 – Deadline for submission: 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020

**Reflection on an aspect of practice/ the role of the student: Building positive relationships in early years settings.**

This paper aims to share with colleagues in the field of early childhood studies my reflections about the importance of positive relations in early year's settings. As a student practitioner, the building of positive relationship has always been an area that has intrigued me. Gibb's reflective theory model (1988) guides and informs my process. Reflection on practice is very important for personal and professional development as it enhances learning. Gibbs (1988) argues that reflecting on practice provides insight into potential areas of further development. He also suggests that our experiences are insufficient if we do not reflect and learn from them for better outcomes in the future.

This paper will discuss the importance of establishing good relationships with children in the setting, particularly concerning the 'Key person' approach. Then followed by looking at the importance of working in partnership with parents, and finally maintaining a positive relationship within the team of practitioners. I will then conclude with reflective practice as drawn above, in the setting.

Practitioners at any stage of our career play a role of promoting positive relationships as it underpins children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) of the early year foundation stage (Beckley, 2013). Leach (2009:193 in Beckley 2013) also underlined that "interpersonal connections" are at the heart of quality child care. For this reason, as student practitioners, we need to reflect on the way we create a positive relationship with children. Johnston et, al (2018) points out that children are an essential

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part of our practice. Children who are confident in personal, social and emotional development are ready to face the future (Brooker 2007).

One of the four overarching principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017: 6) is that “children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships” the impact on PSED, has been acknowledged in the EYFS (DfE, 2017). Positive relationships entail that adults support children to develop a positive sense of self, and others, which in turn foster positive relationships (DfE, 2017). During the early years, children learn and develop social competencies to manage their emotions, and be able to understand what acceptable behaviour is, in a social context and gain confidence in themselves (DfE, 2017).

There are different kinds of positive relationships within the early years setting. One element is the ‘key-person’ approach which creates positive relationships between the practitioner and the child to meet the child’s needs (DfE, 2017). This relationship embraces the child, their parents/carers and practitioners. According to Elfer et, al (2012), this relationship also enhances trust and respect. The EYFS ((DfE, 2017: 23) stipulates that every child must be assigned a key person “to help them become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents”.

Goldschmeid and Selleck (1996) in Beckley 2013:50) consider the ‘Key person’ approach as a ‘triangle of trust and communication’; an attachment is the purpose of this relationship with the child, the key person and parent.

This relationship helps to meet and respond to the child in a more sensitive way (Beckley, 2013). The setting is open and shares information about the child to the parents. The practitioner gives feedback on the child’s

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developments and wellbeing (Beckley, 2013). The practitioner's qualities, such as empathy, sensitivity, 'attunements', and attachment, are vital to the child in this relationship (Papatheodorou, 2009).

During my work with children, I observed a child whose behaviour was getting difficult to manage in the setting. I managed to build a relationship with the child by observing and reflecting on the child's behaviour. I discovered the activities the child liked and provided the activities. With consistent warmth empathy and being responsive to the child's needs, we were able to manage the behaviour effectively.

Working in partnership with parents is also another way we can enhance a positive relationship. The EYFS (DfE, 2017: 23) urges practitioners to "build a relationship with (the children's) parents." Wolfendale (2000:3) draws on Plowden report (1967) in Macleod-Brudenell and Kay (2008) and agrees that "by involving the parents the children may be, helped." Working with parents in a positive relationship reduces disagreements, confusions and potential hostility. Rather than seeing parents as "intrusive", working closely with parents is beneficial. Hence, effective communications between practitioners and parents are paramount (Macleod-Brudenell and Kay, 2008). Moreover, it is good to involve parents in their children's transition into the nursery that creates an environment in which caring adults share honest and open conversations about the child's progress. Practitioner's positive interaction and working closely with parents in their children's learning helps blend and extends children's learning experiences in the setting and at home (Hallet, 2013). Involving parents in sharing home observations also support children's learning which builds an accurate picture of the child (Pacey, 2020).

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Reed and Canning (2010: 52, in Hey and Oates, 2014) also considers reflective practice as “one of the most valuable learning experiences we can undertake as it requires us to learn from our own experiences and actions”. When I reflect on my inter-semester placement, I realized how building a professional, honest, respectful and trusting relationship with some of the practitioners and parents enhanced my learning experience. (Duffy, 2006). For example, for my case study, I choose to work with a child whose parents I had built a professional relationship with the parent was keen and supporting for me to work with their child.

I engaged in a dialogue with parents. I offered information about my intention of observing their child for my university work. I explained that, I would respect the nursery policies and that I would also go by the nursery confidentiality guidance in terms of children’s information and data protection policy as British Educational Research Association(BERA) Ethical guidance supports(BERA,2018). Also, I invited them to ask questions, being open and having a respectful and honest conversation (Lindon, 2016), which made me build confidence and trust from the child’s parent to do my child’s case study. Also, I often explained and shared my findings. Listening and answering their questions.

On the other hand, the parents shared home observations with me. I suggested some home activities of which the parents were delighted to try at home with their child as they gave me positive feedback as they tried activities with the child. The parents brought in some storybooks from their home country. A staff member who can read and understand their home language shared the storybook with the child and other children. The made the process more culturally relevant for the child.

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Finally, practitioners need to work as a team as research has proven that children thrive not only when they can form positive relationships but also when they see the adults around them demonstrate positive relationships. Brooker (2007) draws on findings from research and asserts that children's capacity to learn and develop a relationship is when they develop relationships with peers, parents, and adults around them. Similarly, Underdown (2007) draws on the work of Heinecke (1992) and sustains that when children see positive relationships, it has an effect on their attachment skills which forms the basis of their long and short term wellbeing. The role of the student practitioner in fostering positive relationships is essential for working in a diverse team (Yates and Simons in Hey and Oates, 2014).

Building positive relationship encourages mutual respect and trust, an environment and a culture where everyone respects differences and can voice out when things are not going well and when things are going smoothly (Siraj and Clarke, 2000). Positive relationships involve not generalizing everyone as the same but rather respecting uniqueness, respecting people's culture, religious backgrounds which include events and festivals, socio-economic status, physical challenges, gender, and sexual orientations (Borkett, 2018). This environment works together and promotes equality and diversity, eliminating all forms of discrimination and prejudice, foster inclusion and making everyone feel valued (Saran and Clarke, 2000).

When I was working in a team in the nursery, I always try to take the opportunity to support, contribute to the planning, give ideas and suggestions. A good relationship with my mentor was vital for my studies. It was also beneficial to work collaboratively in a team with the staff sharing ideas and

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respecting each. There is joy in teamwork as everyone felt valued, Respected and accepted.

In conclusion, I have reflected on my professional journey, which has empowered me to articulate the need to promote and build positive relationships in practice. When adults work in a team, it brings unity and makes everyone feel valued and included. Building positive relationships with children, parents and practitioners and working in harmony as a team is the Centre of early years practice. There is a need for adults to strengthen the relationships in the childcare setting as it supports children's developments. Children learn and develop best in an environment that promotes positive relationships, based on mutual respect, understanding, and serve as a form of security. As children benefit from a positive relationship, it sets them up to be confident and competent adults in life.

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