Care and education in early childhood

This book provides a comprehensive and up-to-date review of key issues in the field of care and education in early childhood. The authors draw on their extensive expertise in the field to provide a book that is uniquely wide-ranging in its coverage.

In this timely and accessible text, students will find:

• an overview of the principles of effective practice;
• discussions on equal opportunities and equal rights;
• an examination of how children learn and the learning difficulties they may face;
• investigations into what working with parents really means;
• a consideration of the different early years systems in operation;
• summaries of key management issues and useful information on how to address them;
• a comparison with European perspectives on early years care and education.

The book covers the whole age range from zero to eight years with a special section on the zero-to-three-years age group. Each chapter is fully referenced to enable the reader to follow up on research or access new materials.

Informative and engaging, the book challenges the reader to think about how underlying theory may be reflected in practice. It is essential reading for all students of early years care and education, and early years practitioners will also find it extremely helpful.

Audrey Curtis is World President of OMEP, the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education, which works with early childhood educators in many parts of the world, and as a consultant to UNESCO and UNICEF. Prior to this, she was a Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Maureen O'Hagan MBE is Director of Quality Assurance at the Council for Awards in Children’s Care and Education (CACHE). She is also President of the National Association of Early Years Practitioners and was awarded the MBE for Services to Education in the 2002 New Years Honours list.
Care and education in early childhood

A student’s guide to theory and practice

Audrey Curtis and Maureen O’Hagan
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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care and education is the subject of considerable debate and interest among governments and politicians in all parts of the world. International organisations such as UNICEF and UNESCO are stressing the importance of providing quality early childhood education and care to all children, not only those from less-advantaged backgrounds. Their arguments are based upon the increasing research evidence that has shown the long-term benefits of offering young children quality care and education in the early years. During recent years in the UK, there have been numerous government initiatives relating to the care and education of young children. Some of these, such as Sure Start, have been very successful, whereas others have proved to be more complicated to implement and fund. Nevertheless, there is now a general consensus among politicians and administrators that quality early childhood care and education should be available to all children if their parents wish it. For children under the age of three this is mainly in the private sector; for older children it is predominantly within the state system.

This Level 4 textbook offers the reader a sound theoretical and practical basis for work or study in the field of early childhood care and education. It aims to cut through the changes and offer sound underpinning theory and practice needed by those who wish to work or are working with the zero-to-eight-years age group. Some chapters are academically based, whilst others link theory and practice, a result of the combined expertise of the authors.

The book opens with a chapter that examines the principles of effective practice. There is an emphasis on the importance of reflective practice and on the reflective practitioner who is able to link theory and practice in order to improve the quality of care and education he or she offers. The following chapter looks closely at Children’s Rights and discusses current legislation in this field. Whilst issues relating to equal opportunities are explored fully in this chapter, the authors have attempted throughout the book to address issues in relation to sex, race, religion and gender.

Chapters 3 and 4, ‘How children learn’ and ‘Communication and communication disorders’, provide the reader with information about current research in these fields. In discussing how children learn, the authors have attempted to provide readers with knowledge that will enable them to support young children’s learning in the most effective way. Consideration is given to the development of memory and concentration skills and the role they play in learning. Attention is also drawn to the role of emotional intelligence in learning and development. There are two parts to the chapter on
communication and communication disorders. The first part deals with the development of verbal and non-verbal skills, highlighting the ways in which social and cultural factors affect language and language learning. There is also a discussion of the challenges of second-language learning and the ways in which the adult can meet the needs of second-language learners. The second part of the chapter introduces some of the main communication disorders that may be met in early childhood settings. Several pages are devoted to the problems associated with the ‘dyslexia syndrome’ and the way this disorder can affect children who suffer from it.

There has been considerable development in the field of work with under-three-year-olds and this has become an important part of the early years practitioner’s role. Brain development before and after birth and how the adult is able to stimulate children’s development during these early years is the subject of Chapter 5. At the time of going to press the Department for Education and Skills has set up a working party to look at a curriculum for under-three-year-olds. It would appear likely that this group will be favouring the High/Scope approach that has been successful in other parts of the world. Feelings and relationships are explored in Chapter 6 and some practical suggestions are given to help practitioners manage young children’s feelings.

Working with parents is a very important aspect of the role of the early years practitioner. Chapter 7 explores what working with parents really means; particularly those issues relating to the differences between parental involvement and partnership with parents.

For many decades play has been recognised as a conduit for learning by early years practitioners. However, in society as a whole it appears that play is neither fully understood nor suitably implemented. The crucial role of play has been threatened by recent curriculum developments as we move from a process model of learning to one that is concerned with end-products. Chapter 8 aims to provide readers with firm evidence with which to argue the case for play in the early years curriculum.

With the rapid increase in the number of early years settings over the past few years, there is a need for practitioners to address the many management issues that arise. Chapter 9 identifies and reflects upon the major areas of concern and provides useful information for managers and would-be managers.

The next two chapters address curriculum issues for children from three to seven years. Chapter 10 offers the reader an account of the different types of early years education systems that are in operation, including the High/Scope and Montessori programmes, as well as an in-depth consideration of the Early Learning Goals and the Foundation Stage for children from three to six years. Chapter 11 investigates the core subjects of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 1. There is a discussion of issues relating to the teaching of reading and mathematics and a consideration of the role of investigation and questioning in the education of young children.

The book ends with a chapter that examines the European perspectives of early years care and education. Information is drawn from both western and eastern Europe to highlight the chief differences and similarities that exist between the UK and its European counterparts.
The early years of education are of crucial importance to children and it is vital that all who work in or who are contemplating working in this field have an understanding of early childhood, theory and practice. This introduction is only able to offer a snapshot of the contents of the book; however, we hope that all those studying or working in the field of early years will find the book’s approach, with its combination of theory and practice, useful.
One of the most important demands of the early years care and education worker is an ability to operate effectively within the job role. All underlying principles of practice should reflect the requirements of the Children Act 1989 as a minimum. In addition to this should be observed the basic rights for the child as laid down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and the Human Rights Act 1998. Effective practice must be an underlying principle for all workers, not just the managers of the setting. It is only by ensuring that practice is effective can one be certain that the children are receiving the best quality of care possible. This chapter will examine the underlying principles of good practice and the reflective practice, which is needed if the child care and education worker is going to deliver a high-quality service. It is important that all practitioners reflect on their practice so that they can acknowledge how things have gone and whether there is room for improvement.

**Underlying principles of practice**

A good starting point is to examine the Statement of Underlying Principles, which is part of the National Standards in Early Years, Care and Education. These ten principles are intrinsically linked with all the National Standards in order to ensure that children and their families will receive a high quality of provision. It is necessary for all NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) candidates to demonstrate as part of their competency that their work practices are based on the ten principles. The ten principles are as follows:

1. **The welfare of the child**

The Children Act 1989 makes it very clear that the welfare of the child is paramount. Therefore children must come first. Children must be listened to and their opinions respected and treated seriously. In managing children’s challenging behaviour the child care and education worker should emphasise the positive aspects of behaviour and physical punishment must never be used.
2 Working in partnership with parents/families

Early years care and education workers must respect a child’s parents and family and work with them in planning the care for their child. It is to be remembered that the parents and family will know more about the child than anyone else and in addition to respecting opinions etc. from parents and carers they must also be given regular information about the child’s development and progress. Child care workers must comply with parents’ wishes for their child and family; cultural and religious values must be respected.

3 Children’s learning and development

The first five years of a child’s life is a period of rapid growth and learning. Therefore children need activities which will stimulate their social, physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional and moral development. The early years curriculum should be linked with a child’s stage of development, which can be ascertained by careful observation of the child and discussions with the parents and family. The child’s progress should be monitored, recorded and shared with the parents.

4 Equality of opportunity

The individuality of each child must be recognised and each child should be treated according to its needs. Each child should have the same opportunities to play, learn and develop according to its potential. Every child should be treated with equal concern thus avoiding stereotyping and labelling on the basis of gender, religion, culture, race, class or disability.

5 Anti-discrimination

Early years care and education workers must not discriminate against any child, group/family. They must respect a child and its family, race, religion, gender, culture, class, language, disability etc. Expressions of prejudice by staff members, children or adults must be challenged and the victims should be supported. Early-years care and education workers must work within the requirements of the laws, i.e. Children Act, Race Relations Act, Human Rights Act, and the policies of the setting.

6 Confidentiality

Policies in the setting relating to confidentiality must be adhered to. Information relating to a child and/or its parents or family must not be disclosed unless it is in the interests of
child protection. In the latter circumstances any disclosure should only be to other professionals involved in the case. Confidentiality policies should also ensure that information about working colleagues is not disclosed without permission.

7 Keeping children safe

It is the responsibility of every child care and education worker to ensure that the setting is safe for the children and fellow workers. Daily work practices should ensure the prevention of accidents and the protection of health. Familiarity with emergency procedures and the recording of accidents must be adhered to. It is also part of the role of the child care and education worker to protect children from abuse.

8 Celebrating diversity

The UK is a pluralistic society and as such it is important that cultural diversity is appreciated and viewed positively; no one culture should be viewed as superior. Children should be helped to develop a sense of their own identity within their race, culture or social group. Children should be introduced to other cultures in a positive way and encouraged to sample food, art, stories and music from different cultures.

9 Working with other professionals

In order to ensure the best interests of the child, when appropriate, early child care and education workers should confer with colleagues and other professionals from outside the setting for support and advice. Respect for other professionals’ opinions should be maintained and confidentiality observed at all times.

10 Reflective practitioner

Reflecting on their own practice is an important part of the role of early years care and education workers. Such reflection should result in the extension of their practice. Continuing professional development would be a part of this extension, as would be advice and support sought from colleagues or other professionals.

A number of the above ten principles are discussed in other chapters in this book; however, there are others that are worth expanding upon here.

Equality of opportunity is an expression that is used very frequently but is not always properly understood when it comes to integrating this into one’s own practices. All early years settings are required to have an equal-opportunities policy but in many cases this sits in a folder on a shelf and is never monitored in terms of how it is being implemented. Equality of opportunity means that each child is given the opportunity to develop to its maximum
potential. However, each child’s potential will be different; therefore each child should be treated according to its own individual needs. Some children’s needs may be greater than others’ and may therefore require a greater input from the staff who are caring for them. In this context the word ‘needs’ does not refer to the special needs of a child but to any need that a child may have—for example the need for outdoor play of a child who lives in a high-rise flat. When a child is accepted into a day-care establishment the first thing that should happen is that its needs are assessed and a plan is drawn up to ensure ways of meeting those needs. All the staff who are caring for the child should have a copy of the assessment and the plan for addressing the areas where there may be needs. In this way the staff team will be working together in the best interests of the child. There should be frequent reviews of each individual child’s needs and assessment done on a regular basis as needs will change over time.

Anti-discriminatory/anti-bias practice is an area that directly affects the delivery of care that a child is getting. As human beings we all have our own biases: that is, areas that we do not feel comfortable about and therefore hold prejudices against. However, whatever these are they must not be allowed to affect the way in which care or education is delivered to children. Staff must never voice or enact their prejudices when dealing with children, parents or other staff. Respect must be shown for all parents, even those whom staff may regard as abysmal. Most parents strive to do their best for their children in spite of very difficult circumstances and some of these parents may not have the knowledge and skills to distinguish what is the right thing to do in a particular circumstance. The last thing that these parents need is a lack of understanding from the people who are caring for their children. Situations such as poverty, homelessness, poor diet and so on may not be the fault of the parents, who may be the victims of society. These circumstances require the early years worker to have empathy and understanding so that a relationship can be formed that is beneficial to the child and the parent. In the same way, the early years worker must ensure that he or she is not behaving in a biased fashion towards children because of the parents’ behaviour. After all, the child is not able to control its parents. An integral part of maintaining an anti-bias early years setting is taking action when incidents arise. Siraj-Blatchford (2000) offers the following short-term action strategies, which can be implemented as soon as the incident takes place:

- explaining to the person/child making the remarks that they are offensive and hurtful;
- explaining why the remarks are hurtful and trying to tease out the feelings of the person who made the remark and the receiver;
- explaining why the comment was wrong and correcting any misconceptions which the remark may convey;

and long-term action strategies, such as:

- working with parents whose children have made the remarks and ensuring they understand the setting’s equal-opportunities policy;
- creating an ethos in the setting that promotes and values diversity;
• developing topics and reading stories which raise issues of similarities and differences in language, gender and ethnicity;
• encouraging children to talk about their feelings.

In their book *Anti-Bias Training Approaches in the Early Years*, Gaine and van Keulen (1997) offer a list of attitudes which early years workers need to develop.

Students/workers will show through their practice that they:

• respect and value the individuality of children, their families and other members of staff;
• are willing and able to learn from others;
• are willing and able to think critically about child development theory and are able to recognise the bias of theorists;
• are willing and able to reflect on their own ethnic and cultural experiences;
• are committed to implementing a culturally relevant anti-bias approach;
• are actively engaged in resisting discrimination;
• are able to empathise, i.e. to put themselves in other people’s shoes and feel them pinching;
• feel confident about their own ethnic and cultural identity.

MacNaughton (1999) states that staff should be aware of providing a wide range of opportunities for all children, regardless of social class, ability, gender or culture, and even challenging children to cross gender or cultural boundaries through play. Staff need to facilitate this play by encouraging children to join in with their peers and supporting the interactions without controlling them. In this advice MacNaughton is able, very succinctly, to offer an example of good practice that covers both equal opportunities and anti-bias practice. In her book *Combating Discrimination* (2001), Babette Brown offers ways in which early years practitioners are able to challenge children’s hurtful remarks to other children through the use of ‘persona dolls’. A persona doll is a tool that can be used to help a child empathise with another child or with what is happening to a child. Early years workers use the dolls as vehicles in order to facilitate powerful story-telling sessions. Children are able to talk about how the doll was feeling when a hurtful remark was made about it, such as when being called names by other children or being bullied. The children are able to empathise with the feelings of the doll and offer solutions for helping the doll feel better and gain its self-esteem. Thus persona dolls empower children to respect the feelings of others.

Following on from equal opportunities and anti-bias working, it would seem logical to go to the eighth principle, *Celebrating diversity*. This area is about children developing a feeling of worth and self-esteem within the setting regardless of their cultural background. This can be achieved by the staff presenting a variety of cultures in such a way that they are viewed by the children and adults as positive images, which are valued and integrated into the ethos of the setting. However, Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) do offer a warning about well-meaning but poorly informed practice in this area. They point out that token measures such as multilingual posters, black dolls, puzzles and books
with positive gender role models are rarely the focus of attention. Misplaced are the energies of staff who provide a thematic approach such as ‘Greek week’ or ‘Chinese New Year’ without recognising that diversity should be reflected across the curriculum. If a setting is going to celebrate festivals then these should be part of an overall multi-faith/multicultural curriculum programme. What children learn about the real story of Easter from bunnies, chicks and chocolate eggs is debatable. In fact, these ideas probably stem from the Christian Church, when all eggs were used up on Shrove Tuesday (hence the pancakes) to enable the fasting period required through Lent; eggs then came back into circulation on Easter Sunday. However, I am unable to find any reference to how bunnies came into the picture! Celebrating festivals with children can be fun and may help them to learn something about other cultures but, as Brown (2001) points out, such festivals are unlikely to have much effect upon children’s attitudes towards adults and children from these cultures. There is a need to examine why we celebrate particular festivals and a need to ensure cooperation of the parents, who may not wish the early years establishment to celebrate something that is usually confined to its own community. Bisson (1997) offers the following objectives in the celebration of festivals:

- to promote connections among children, families and practitioners;
- to learn about important events in the lives of all children and families;
- to support and validate the experiences of children, their families and practitioners;
- to reinforce connection to cultural roots;
- to celebrate both similarities and differences in children’s lives;
- to stretch children’s awareness and empathy.

(Bisson 1997:36–7)

Confidentiality is an integral part of the work of the early years care and education practitioner. The Oxford English Dictionary offers the following definitions of confidential:

1 spoken or written in confidence;
2 entrusted with secrets.

Confidentiality therefore means being entrusted with information that the discloser does not wish to be passed on to anybody else.

Because of the nature of their work, early years practitioners will often find themselves in a position whereby a parent, family member or carer is disclosing information that needs to be kept confidential. Such disclosure may be given in order for the parent, family member or carer to ensure that those caring for the child are aware that there are particular circumstances that may affect the child’s behaviour or emotions. The early years practitioner must then decide whether the disclosure is of such a level of seriousness that it needs to be passed on to a more senior member of staff. The benchmark for any judgement in this area must be the welfare of the child. Certain information may need to be passed on in order to protect the child. Once the practitioner has passed on the information, he or she has broken confidentiality with the person who disclosed the information. This is a common dilemma for many early years practitioners.
Most early years settings have a policy relating to confidentiality and this must be adhered to at all times. In the first instance, when the original disclosure is being made, if the practitioner judges that it is information that may have serious consequences then he or she should try to persuade the discloser to talk to a senior member of staff. The practitioner may also, gently but firmly, explain to the discloser that, as the practitioner, he or she will have to pass the information to a senior member of staff as this is the policy of the setting. This decision may be met with hostility from the discloser, who may need to be reminded that the child’s welfare is paramount.

In addition to information relating to children, the practitioner may also be disclosed confidential information by members of staff. Once again, there may be information known that could affect the children in the care of the discloser and the practitioner must make a decision as to whether to pass this on. For example, what do you do if a fellow worker reveals to you that he or she has a drug addiction problem, or has forged cheques, or is having an affair with a parent of one of the children? Once again, the welfare of the child/children is paramount and it is always best if you can persuade the discloser to speak to a senior member of staff. If this suggestion is not met with agreement then you may have to explain to the discloser that you will have to reveal the information to a senior member of staff as it could affect the welfare of the children in the setting.

In addition to verbal disclosures of information, there are other ways in which practitioners can breech confidentiality. Child studies/observations, which may be placed in portfolios or dissertations, require the permission of the child’s parents before they can be used outside the setting. It is also necessary to change the child’s name and/or only use a first name for the child. Photographs in such studies are not a good idea (even with a parent’s permission to take them) as they immediately identify the child to the reader of the study/observation, who may know the child. Particular care must be taken that a dissertation or child study ensures that the identity of the child is totally anonymous.

Another situation in which practitioners may break confidentiality is in talking about a child/family to another member of staff in a public place, such as on a bus, train, or in a bar. You never know when someone nearby is listening or is able to overhear the conversation, and this person may know the child or people you are talking about. It is not professional behaviour to discuss such matters in a place where you can be overhead. Discussing the matter in the first place may be a breech of confidentiality. In more recent years it has become a familiar sight to see people on trains or in other out-of-office locations working on laptop computers. There appears to be a myth that nobody else is able to read the screen of the laptop; however, sitting behind the operator puts someone in a perfect position to read what is on the screen. It is therefore not a wise move to decide to catch up on confidential documentation whilst working outside of the office. Many people also find it easy to read handwriting from a position upside-down to them. A breech in confidentiality, however it happened and whether it was intentional or accidental, is a serious lapse of professionalism.
The reflective practitioner

This is number ten on the list of underlying principles and is also an integral part of this chapter. One of the basic tenets of effective practice is the ability to reflect on one’s own practice. Reflection is becoming a core skill in the profession of early years care and education and is found in unit EYD7 in the NVQ Level 4 National Standards, which is assessed in terms of the candidate producing a reflective account of his or her practice. Reflection on one’s practice is one of the important differences between the professional child care and education worker and the non-professional, ‘mum’s army’ worker. Professionals claim to contribute to social well-being, put the client’s needs before their own and hold themselves accountable to standards of competence and morality. Professionals also claim a body of knowledge that shapes the profession; in Early Years Care and Education this has been legitimised by the National Framework of Qualifications, which offers the underpinning knowledge for the profession. Practitioners are frequently embroiled in conflicts of values, goals, purposes and interests. For example, teachers are faced with pressures for increased efficiency whilst at the same time they are expected to work within ever-decreasing budgets. Such dilemmas, which are out of the control of the teachers, make them disturbed, as they cannot account for the processes they have come to see as central to their professional competence.

The term ‘reflective practitioner’ was first coined by Donald Schön (1983) as a way for the professional to be able to resolve problems that did not just rely upon his or her professional knowledge. Schön refers to work by Edgar Schein that states that there is a gap between the application of knowledge—what he refers to as being ‘convergent’—and practice—which he refers to as ‘divergent’. Therefore, professionals in the areas of social work, teaching and so on need divergent thinking skills in order to resolve problems, as resolution cannot be solved by theory alone. Professionals have to analyse particular circumstances in order to assess how best to respond to them—what may be referred to as ‘thinking on your feet’ or ‘keeping your wits about you’.

Schön maintains that a professional practitioner is a specialist who encounters certain types of situation over and over again and hence why the word ‘case’ is used by the practitioner to describe units that go together to make up practice. Practitioners may reflect on practice whilst they are in the midst of it—what Schön calls ‘reflection-in-action’. Reflection-in-action is central to the practitioner coping with divergent situations. This process of reflecting and analysing particular circumstances is what is referred to as reflective practice.

Megarry (2000) gives the following very good simple example of how using theory alone to analyse a problem can fail to take in all the variables and thus come to the wrong conclusions:

A child consistently behaves badly when he comes to the childcare setting. There has recently been a new baby in the family and his mother tells you that she does not have time to give the child breakfast before he comes to the childcare setting. Using the knowledge of theory would tell you that children need a balanced breakfast before they start the day. Based on this theoretical knowledge the child’s behaviour
must be due to the fact that he is nutritionally deficient—hungry. So if you give the child breakfast his behaviour will improve.

Reflection-in-action would not draw this conclusion as it would enable the early years worker to take a holistic approach in order to consider all the variables: new baby; harassed parent; lack of attention to older child, and so on. Schön points out that in the real world problems do not present themselves as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations that are puzzling, troubling and uncertain—what Schön refers to as ‘problem-setting’. Problem-setting is a process in which we select what we will treat as the ‘things’ of the situation, set the boundaries of our attention to it and impose upon it a coherence that allows us to say what is wrong and in what directions the situation needs to be changed. In short, we define the problem, the end, and the means to the end.

According to Schön, to be an effective reflective practitioner it is necessary to be able to recognise:

• knowing-in-action;
• reflecting-in-action;
• reflecting-in-practice.

Knowing-in-action

This is the kind of knowing that is inherent in intelligent action; the know-how is in the action. Skilful action often involves knowing more than we can say. Schön gives the following properties of knowing:

• There are actions, recognitions and judgements, which we know how to carry out spontaneously; we do not have to think about them prior to or during their performance.
• We are often unaware of having learned to do these things; we simply find ourselves doing them.
• In some cases, we were once aware of the understandings, which were subsequently internalised in our feeling for the stuff of action. In other cases, we may never have been aware of them. In both cases, however, we are usually unable to describe the knowing which our action reveals.

Reflecting-in-action

Much of reflecting-in-action hinges on surprise. This is the ‘thinking on your feet’, ‘keeping your wits about you’ situation. It shows that we can think about something whilst we are doing it. (This seems to describe a very familiar situation for early years workers who are good at this type of thinking.)
Reflecting-in-practice

This involves reflecting on and questioning the above categories, on the way in which we acted and responded to different situations, and on our own role in the workplace.

A practitioner’s reflection can serve as a corrective to over-learning. Through reflection, the practitioner can surface and criticise tacit understandings that have grown up around repetitive experiences of a specialised practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness that may be experienced. The practitioner needs to be open to his or her own practice and ready to see ways in which to improve on both knowing-in-action and reflecting-in-action.

Jill Rodd (1994) uses the term ‘action research’ to refer to a way of thinking that uses reflection and enquiry as a way of understanding the conditions that support or inhibit change. This is very different from Schön’s thesis as it does not involve ‘thinking on your feet’ but is a six-point plan that is carried out as a team activity over a period of time. However, there does seem to be a valid place for both the Rodd and Schön theses within the early years care and education settings. Rodd points out that in action research the problem needs to be meaningful for the team and the team leader; it must be manageable within a realistic time-frame and appropriate to the research skills of the people involved. There also needs to be a healthy attitude within the team to problem solving and risk taking.

Rodd (citing Wadswoth (1984) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)) gives the following seven steps in the action-research-process cycle:

1. Identifying the problems of mutual concern—the present problems are brought into focus through the processes of observation and reflection by all members of the team.
2. Analysing problems and determining possible contributing factors—the ability to diagnose the determinants of a problem is required. The existing situation is monitored using recorded uncensored and uninterpreted observations from the members of the team.
3. Forming tentative working hypotheses or guesses to explain these factors—at this point, questionable assumptions are eliminated. Decisions are made about the form and method of the interpretation of the data which are to be collected.
4. Collecting and interpreting data from observations, interviews and relevant documents to clarify these hypotheses and to develop action hypotheses—accurate details of events need to be recorded in order to avoid erroneous or superficial influences.
5. Formulating plans for action and carrying them out—plans are experimental, prospective and forward-looking and may involve the acquisition of new skills or procedures in order to implement the plans.
6. Evaluating the results of the action—the processes of observation and reflection are used to critically assess the effects of the informed action and to make sense of the processes and issues that unfolded during the implementation phase. Collaborative
reflection provides an opportunity to reconstruct meaning out of the situation and establishes a basis for a revised plan.

7 Introducing a revised cycle from step 1 to step 6.

In addition to the above there are the stages that go towards promoting reflection in general, as cited in Megarry (2000). These are outlined below.

**Stage 1: Returning to experience**

This is where the experience is revisited by recollecting what has taken place and replaying the experience in the mind’s eye in order to observe the event as it happened and to notice exactly what occurred and one’s reaction to it in all its elements.

This description provides the data for subsequent processes and can help to ensure that our reflections are on the basis of the actual events as we experienced them at the time rather than in terms of what we wished had happened.

The description should as far as possible:

* be clear of any judgements;
* observe the feelings evoked during the experience, both positive and negative.

**Stage 2: Attending to feelings experienced**

Emotions can be a signification source of learning as they can form barriers to learning, which need to be recognised and removed before the learning process can proceed.

**Stage 3: Re-evaluating the experience**

Elements of the whole process are:

* association—relating new data to that already known;
* integration—seeking relationships among the data;
* validation—determining the authenticity of the ideas and feelings that have resulted;
* appropriation—making knowledge one’s own.

The outcomes of reflection may include:

* a new way of doing something;
* the clarification of an issue;
* the development of a skill;
* the resolution of a problem.

The changes and benefits of reflection may be small or large but unless they are linked to action they are worthless. Actions may not necessarily be observed or recognised by
others but what is important is that the learner makes a commitment to action on the basis of his or her learning.

The ability to reflect on one’s own practice or to promote action research within a team is one of the qualifications for leadership as put forward by Hodgkinson (1991), who states that leadership is:

- an art rather than a science;
- focused on policy rather than execution;
- concerned with values rather than facts;
- to do with generalism rather than specialism;
- the use of broad strategies rather than specific tactics;
- concerned with philosophy rather than action;
- reflective rather than active;
- concerned with human as opposed to material resources;
- focused on deliberation rather than detail.

The importance of reflective practice is recognised in the Level 4 National Standards in Early Years Care and Education in the form of an externally assessed unit within the core units. The unit is entitled ‘Access and review and update your own knowledge of significant and emerging theory and practice’, and the element titles are as follows:

D7.1 ‘Evaluate and update your own knowledge and practice’;
D7.2 ‘Establish and implement procedures to review and update current knowledge and practice’;
D7.3 ‘Integrate outcomes from review into own practice’;
D7.4 ‘Apply underpinning equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory values and principles to own work’.

The assessment method for this unit is via an externally assessed piece of work, which draws together knowledge and performance evidence. A major self-reflective study is the required evidence for assessment of the unit, thus legitimising the fact that the reflective practitioner is a very important part of the role of early years care and education workers who wish to undertake leadership roles.

References