

NEXTGEN: HNC CHILDHOOD PRACTICE



META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

Practitioners' reflections and advice
on incorporating meta-skills.

NEXTGEN: HNC CHILDHOOD PRACTICE — META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

We asked subject-specialist writers with experience of delivering meta-skills in NextGen: HN Qualifications to write a 'Meta-skills in practice' guide, giving us a sense of how they approach the integration of meta-skills within course delivery. In this way, practitioners could share real-life insights, practical advice, and examples with course teams who are new to NextGen Qualifications and meta-skills.

Lee Anne, early years lecturer, explained in their words how the course team at their college contextualise, integrate, and assess engagement with meta-skills within NextGen: HNC Childhood Practice.

TOP TIPS

- **Introduce meta-skills at the beginning of course.** During group work encourage learners to share their perspective of what each meta-skill could look like in college and on their placements.
- **Encourage learners to regularly reflect on their meta-skills development.** The focus on meta-skills in the reflective practice unit is a good time to do this; regular, timetabled reflection can help prevent overwhelm.
- **Discuss meta-skills with NextGen teaching colleagues.** Make sure they encourage learners to use meta-skills language as much as possible.
- **Use visual aids.** Posters and wall displays help keep the focus on meta-skills.

META-SKILLS IN CHILDHOOD PRACTICE

Give us a general introduction to meta-skills within the context of your subject area.

Incorporating meta-skills into the Childhood Practice course is not a new concept; it's something we have always done in this course and this profession. The difference is the new terminology, and recognising where and how each of the skills fits naturally into our courses.

“...meta-skills [...] is not a new concept [...] The difference is the new terminology..”

Meta-skills are essential for professionals working closely with legislation and policies such as CFE (Curriculum for Excellence), GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) and UNCRC (United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child) to support the wellbeing and development of children and young people. These skills help professionals to engage in meaningful relationships, collaborate effectively and promote positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

These foundational skills form the basis for lifelong learning and future academic

“ [recognising] their own meta skills [...] is the first step to training reflective and future-ready professionals

success. In early years childhood practice, we focus on creating a supportive and stimulating environment that nurtures these types of skills in children through play-based learning, exploration and positive interactions. Ensuring our learners

can recognise their own meta-skills and identify areas for development is the first step to training reflective and future-ready professionals, who can foster these skills in others.

META-SKILLS CATEGORIES IN CONTEXT

Explain the three meta-skills categories as they relate to your subject.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Within Childhood Practice, learners must be able to sort information, actively listen during classes and placement, and ask relevant questions to help stay on track.

We need our learners to act in an honest, ethical and fair way; they need to be consistent and have a strong sense of self-belief and personal values.

Being sensitive towards others' feelings and abilities is particularly important in the placement element where learners engage with children, parents, staff and external agencies.

Childhood practice is an ever-changing profession, so it's essential to be flexible and open to new ideas. This is especially important during their placement, when learners are engaging in 'Planning In The Moment' and child-led play.

We want learners to have courage and self-belief when exploring new opportunities. Developing the skills and confidence to show initiative and perform well as part of a team in a busy and fast-paced early years placement environment benefits learners, children and colleagues.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Communication is equally important in college and placement. Communicating in an open and honest way when sharing information, thoughts and ideas — whether in class tasks or group work — is key. During their placements, learners use appropriate oral and body language when communicating with children and staff and, in some cases, may have the opportunity to communicate with parents and external agencies.

Building and maintaining relationships in college and placement is essential for collaborative working towards a shared goal; this includes listening to other people's views, and reasoning to reach a good outcome.

Learners need to be aware of the impact their actions have on other people, whether when working on group tasks and assessments, or during their placements.

Developing leadership skills in Childhood Practice includes taking ownership of a task, and leading and inspiring others. In their placements, learners experience leadership in a variety of areas; for example, nurture lead, ICT lead, literacy/numeracy lead, and outdoor learning lead.

You do not need to be in a leadership or management position to develop leadership skills. Continued professional development in line with SSSC codes of conduct require learners to take the lead in their own learning.

INNOVATION

Childhood Practice learners should explore and investigate new concepts and ideas, carrying out self-directed study to increase their knowledge and understanding of theories, and policy and legislation related to childhood practice.

During their placements, learners should observe and ask questions about their surroundings, and learn about placement policies.

Being creative is not just about art, dance, music and drama but rather having the ability to use your imagination and initiative to create solutions. During their placements, learners should try to develop their creativity to plan experiences and take the children's learning forward.

Critical thinking skills involve breaking down complex problems and processing, evaluating and analysing information to come to a solution. In college work, learners should ask focused questions to clarify tasks to set and achieve goals. During their placements, they need to develop their ability to plan in the moment, and explain and justify methods used.

INTRODUCING AND UNDERSTANDING META-SKILLS

How do you help learners to buy in to meta-skills and understand their relevance?

It's a good idea to introduce meta-skills at the beginning of the course to encourage learners to become familiar with the vocabulary and concepts involved.

PRODUCING MIND MAPS ABOUT DEVELOPING THESE SKILLS...

In our pilot year, our learners found it difficult to understand some of the meta-skills and to identify opportunities to develop them. We looked at the meaning of each meta-skill in

relation to Childhood Practice and produced mind maps of how these skills could be developed in placements and in class. Our learners produced these mind maps in small groups, then shared and discussed them to allow other groups to add information that they had maybe not considered.

...AND RELATING THESE TO COLLEGE AND PLACEMENTS

Learner feedback was positive with many saying the interaction was helpful in developing meta-skills — collaboration, communication, feeling, sense-making, critical thinking — and they felt this would have been more difficult had it been an individual task. They also found it helpful to come to a common understanding of each skill, and how each relates to their college and placement experiences. Thereafter they could refer to the mind maps throughout the year to refresh their understanding of each meta-skill.

“...helpful to see learners relate to their experience of meta-skills in their placements

DEVELOPING META-SKILLS

Tell us about your experiences, hindsight and future plans. Where do meta-skills fit most naturally in your course delivery?

ASSESSING META-SKILLS AND SETTING GOALS

It is essential that learners understand meta-skills in relation to their own life, college course and placement. We set a baseline meta-skills assessment for learners to complete at the start of the course. We were then able to revisit this mid-way through course and again at the end. Alongside this, it is good practice for the learner to set achievable meta-skills goals, particularly goals that are linked to their college work and their placement.

One learner said to us, 'I feel I need to improve on taking my own initiative, and on taking actions before others and before being asked. Since I have started on my placement, I do

think I have improved on this a lot but still have to improve in certain aspects. I want to improve my ability to take initiative and my confidence; I want to not worry about things so much, and to have a positive mindset.' As practitioners, we discussed connecting these goals to some practical actions, like taking on certain responsibilities in group work, and using the SDS goal-setting paperwork to record progress. We found this helpful, as it isn't complicated and doesn't take much time.

USING VISUAL DISPLAYS AND LINKING IN WITH MIND MAPS

Learners can develop their meta-skills during both class time and their placements. One of the approaches we took to help with regular or ongoing reflection was using visual displays. This approach aligns with the type of creative learning that we'd expect childhood practitioners to master during the course. In early years learning, visual displays are used everywhere, and practitioners are expected to display information for parents, children's work and initiatives. It's a useful transferable skill to develop.

A visual and interactive meta-skills display also encouraged our learners to continually think about and look at ways to develop their own meta-skills. It allowed for peer learning and, for me as a lecturer new to meta-skills delivery, it was a good opportunity to recognise what areas weren't being developed and to question why.

After consulting with learners, it was evident that they were not confident with the

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...[at first] they were not
confident with the language
or relevance of some skills

language or relevance of some skills. This prompted us to revisit the initial individual mind maps for each meta-skill, and discuss ways those skills might segue into their studies, placements and future working

lives. Of course, it is also important to note that within Childhood Practice there will be opportunities to develop some meta-skills more than others.

This year I gave learners a project to come up with ideas for the meta-skills wall display, and then vote on their preferences. In their opinion, the first wall display they produced was 'awful'. I asked them to reflect on this and they realised that they hadn't communicated or worked well together, and this had resulted in trees that were too big for the space and some that were too small for leaves to fit on. They decided to start

again. This helped the learners recognise what they needed to improve, and they went on to produce a better display that was fit for purpose.

“ Use creative ways to help learners recognise what they need to improve...”

Mid-way through the year, the students added their mind maps to the bottom of the display to help prompt them on different ways they could develop each meta-skill, and to allow them to refer to them in discussions and presentations.

META-SKILLS REFLECTIONS IN LEARNERS' OWN WORDS

— Leading

'My partner in a group assessment voiced her stress about doing the work and had laptop difficulties. I took the lead and supported her to do her research and created the PowerPoint. We passed the assessment as a result of this.'

— Critical thinking

'This week in placement I was able to improve my critical thinking skills while doing a risk assessment. By observing, having knowledge and being able to gather information from my co-workers and mentor, I was able to work out a safety plan for my room and garden area.'

— Adapting

'During today's lesson we had an unexpected power cut whilst presenting group research, despite this we adapted by sharing our presentation on CANVAS/Teams so our class still had access to the information provided. It made us realise that we need to be ready for things not going well.'

GENERATING ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

We've produced guidance around the assessment of meta-skills. There's quite a lot of flexibility around assessment evidence. Can you give us a sense of what you've been doing in this space?

ENCOURAGING PLACEMENT PARTNERS TO USE META-SKILLS VOCABULARY

Assessing meta skills involves all lecturers and placement partners. We expect learners to use meta-skills language in all their assessments and written work. This way we can see the learner in the broadest sense and can discuss how they have performed during

“ The more learners use meta-skills terminology, the more natural it will be for them to use it in their studies or interviews.

professional discussions, presentations, practical and written work. We discuss learners' meta-skills development during the staff tracking meetings. You could adapt placement paperwork to

incorporate some of the meta-skills language to share with placement partners, who could encourage learners to recognise opportunities to develop these skills.

The more learners use meta-skills terminology, the more natural it will be for them to use it in their further studies or workplace interviews. Our centre encouraged learners to produce a document at the end of the academic year where they collated all the information they had contributed to the meta-skills wall display throughout the year. This reminded them where they felt they had had the opportunity to develop both in college and in placement. Alongside this, we asked learners to write a more in-depth reflective piece looking at the relationship between meta-skills, their learning and their work. To be work-ready practitioners, learners need to recognise the interrelation of all assessments, placement experiences and class tasks.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED RESOURCES AND APPROACHES

- Meta-skills mindmapped to course
- Posters and visual displays
- One-to-one discussions and group discussions
- Research and lectures
- Align placement paperwork with meta-skills