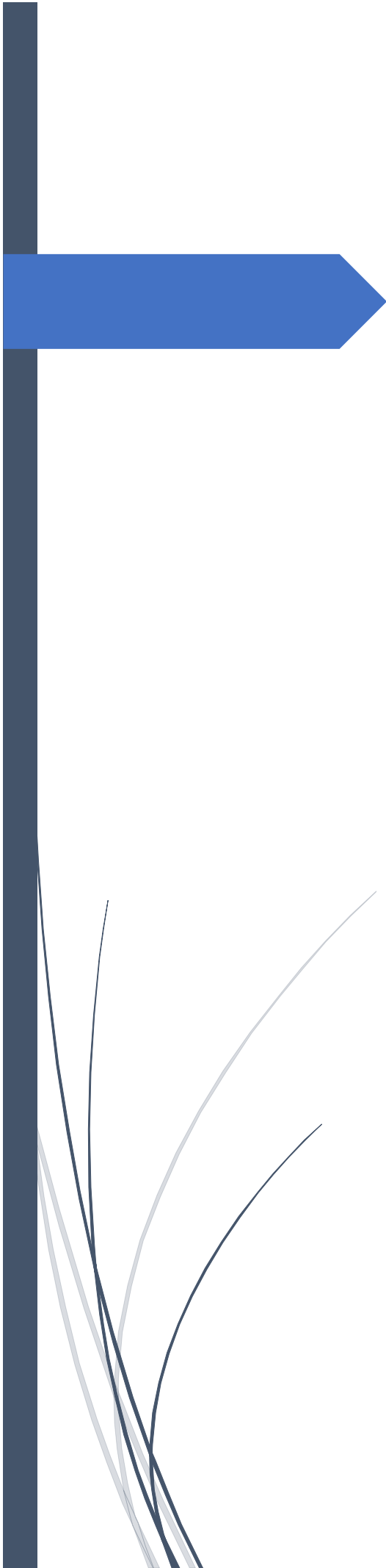




Reflections on Early Years Practice

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Element 1

Reflection is a 'systematic reviewing process' which enables a person to make links between one experience to another (Cambridge Assessment, no date). This process enables a person to critically analyse and make connections between what happened in a particular experience, what they learnt from it and how they can apply this learning to future experiences (University of Guelph, 2018).

Reflective practice has evolved over the years through theory, research and application. John Dewey's concept of reflective teaching is often recognised as one of the most influential reflective theories in education during the twentieth century (Guesdon, 2010; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Smith, 2013). Dewey (1938) states that 'we do not learn from experience, but from reflecting on experience'. Dewey believed that open-mindedness, whole-heartedness and responsibility are key attitudes which play a crucial role in the development of reflective practice (Guesdon, 2010). In 1983, Donald Schon later built upon the work of Dewey and identified two types of reflection: reflection on action and reflection in action. These theories have helped with the professional development of practitioners and improved their practice (University of Southampton, 2020). Reflection in action allows the practitioner promptly review and reshape the experience as it is unfolding, whereas reflecting on action requires the practitioner to reflect on an experience after it has happened in a deeper and more comprehensive way (Iriss, no date).

Over recent years many models of reflection have been created and adopted to. This paper will analyse two models of reflection to determine the advantages and disadvantages of both models and how they can be adopted by early years practitioners in order help them become effective reflective practitioners and deliver a high quality provision within their setting. The two reflective models discussed in this paper are Gibbs' Reflective Cycle developed by Graham Gibb's in 1988 and Rolfe et. al's 2001 Reflective Model.

Gibb's six step cycle encourages people to reflect on their experiences in a structured and systematic way. Using simple language allows the cycle to be more accessible to those beginning to understand reflective practice. It has clear steps to follow providing

an opportunity for people to think in more depth about their feelings during a particular event. On the contrary Rolfe et. al's Reflective Model is a much simpler cycle made up of three questions, 'what?, so what?, what now?'. These three basic questions are easy to remember, therefore making this model more accessible to reflect promptly during the actual experience. This model can be applied to reflect on almost any situation or experience. The model is often described as 'superficial' although reflections using this model should be as comprehensive as possible. The reflective questions at each level go much deeper than the question itself therefore making every level of the reflection model detailed, evaluative and action- orientated. (Brown, 2015; Deakin University, no date; Dabell, 2018). Although this model has the ability to expand the level of reflection, it does not give specific guidance on how deep one should evaluate an experience.

Gibb's Reflective Cycle includes the opportunity to reflect on feelings. This develops more awareness of one's feelings and thoughts during a situation which in return it can allow people to become more mindful of how emotions can affects one's behaviours and actions (Josephine, 2019). Gibb's inclusion of feelings in this reflective cycle allows a person to highlight any areas for improvements or potential triggers for any negative emotions displayed or felt with a particular experience. This will give the person reflective feedback and a chance to make an action plan to improve the outcome in the future. However, many people often find it difficult to express their feelings honestly. People may find it uncomfortable to draw attention to negative feelings or behaviours during a particular experience therefore rather than working through their feelings, reflecting on their behaviour may prompt them to use defence mechanisms to help resolve their anxieties rather than finding alternative ways to respond to a situation in the future (John, 2013). Unlike Gibb's model, Rolfe et al's model does not include reflection on one's feelings. Reflecting on an experience and not including analysis on one's feelings may impact on the outcome of the reflective process. It may be that the choices during an experience was solely impacted by the emotional behaviour of the person therefore if the feelings are not reflected upon then there is a high possibility that the person will not be able to form the best action plan on how to grow and move forward. On the other hand, Rolfe et al's Reflective model leaves a possibility for emotions to be included in the 'So what?' level. The University of Edinburgh (2020) points out that as there is no set list of reflective questions in this

model, there maybe a possibility for vital areas of reflection to be left out, therefore a meaningful and critical depth of reflection may not be achieved.

Jasper (2013) highlights how Gibbs's Cycle shows a personal reflection of the practitioner rather than a collaborative reflection. Every person's emotions or feelings during an experience may differ therefore this cycle can limit the reflection process to a more personal level rather than on a group level. However, it is just as important to reflect individually as it is important to reflect as part of a team. Rolfe et al's model may prove to be more effective during the reflective process of a team as it doesn't focus as deeply on the feelings and the emotions of an individual person but more on the feelings on a more collective level.

To conclude, both reflective models have the potential to be useful methods to use as an early year's practitioner. While Gibb's Model of Reflection requires more time to critically reflect on a situation and is a useful model to use when reflection on action is required, the simplicity of Rolfe et al's model makes it accessible to be used when reflecting in action. Although Gibb's cycle may be more beneficial to a person beginning to understand reflective practice as it has clear structured guidance on how to critically reflect in practice, whereas Rolfe et al's model may be more useful to a more experienced reflective practitioner who is able to use one's own initiative of what areas and questions to reflect on in each level of the model. Gibb's Reflective Cycle is also commonly used within healthcare and education sectors (UK Essays, 2020) the opportunity this model provides to reflect on one's emotions and feelings during an experience coincides with the pedagogy's of professionals within these care sectors. Zembylas (2014) also notes how the emotions of teachers influence the way in which they organise their curriculum and teaching, also stating 'that teachers' emotional experiences and their reflection about their emotions are inextricably linked to their pedagogy'.

Element 2

Briefing Paper: Reflections on Early Years Practice

Introduction: the intention of this briefing paper is to highlight the importance of reflective practice within your roles as Early Years Practitioners and how reflection on your own practice can positively impact the services and experiences you offer to children and their families.

"Without reflection, there is no learning" ~ Jack Mezirow (Saberr, 2018)

What is reflection and reflective practice?:

To 'reflect' is to simply think of something. By reflecting, it allows us to develop skills and understand their effectiveness. It helps us to develop our self awareness by asking ourselves a series of questions in order to develop a more efficient way of doing things (The Open University no date). To develop our self awareness, we must be honest with ourselves and take responsibility of our own thoughts, emotions and behavioural patterns (Career Force, 2017). Reflective practice is a more professional way to learn through experience. By reviewing a situation, you can reflect on what the experience was, what happened and what you would do differently next time, making sure the positive aspects of a particular experience are acknowledged as well as the negatives (Skills You Need, no date). One of the characteristics differentiating reflection from reflective practice is that reflective practice is usually expressed in a systematic way through expressing one's thoughts through written, spoken or pictorial evidence (CIPD, no date).

Reflective practice can benefit practitioners by:

- Increasing self awareness
- Developing a better understanding of others
- Developing creative thinking skills
- Encourages active engagement
- Helping you to understand and work through different emotions
- Encouraging teamwork
- Developing communication skills
- Increasing emotional intelligence
- Developing problem solving skills
- Providing opportunities for continuous professional development

(Skills You Need, 2020) 5

Why is reflective practice important?:

It is important for self evaluation and reflective practice to be embedded in the professional behaviour of early years practitioners in order to provide high quality and effective services to children and their families (Smith and Roberts, 2015). Reflecting on your own practice not only benefits you on a personal and professional level but it allows practitioners to effectively meet the needs of the children and their families (McFarland, Saunders and Allen, 2009). Dallos and Stedmon (2009) notes how reflective practice not only assist with learning but can be a therapeutic process when developing a conscious awareness of one's thoughts and actions. Openness and transparency are key elements in developing reflective practice (Venninen et al, 2012).

Reflection as part of a team is equally important to reflecting individually (Jay and Johnson, 2012; Saberr, 2018). Systematic and continuous team reflection can have a positive effect on the well being of early years practitioners. Working on reflection as part of a team can make practitioners feel more actively involved, feel more respected within their role, less isolated therefore enhancing their sense of belonging and increasing self efficiency notes Cigala, Venturelli and Bassetti (2019).

Reflective practice provides quality services to children and their families by:

- Achieving the best outcomes for children and their families through in action and on action reflections
 - Promoting respectful and responsive reflections in a timely manner to improve the quality of services for children and their families
 - Recognising and working towards achieving common goals for professionals working across agencies in early childhood'
 - Enabling a deeper understanding of the development and needs of children
- (Longford County Childhood Committee, 2017)

Reflective Models: There are numerous successful models of reflection. They share many common features although may vary in depth, structure and format. The diagram below is an example of Graham Gibb's Reflective Cycle developed in 1988.

It is designed to allow reflective practitioners to review an experience in a systematic way. The explanatory way in which this cycle is set out makes it an ideal model to use for practitioners who are beginning to understand reflective practice. Following this guided model can help you analyse and evaluate the positive and negative aspects of your practice and develop an action plan as to how you are going to make necessary improvements (University of Edinburgh, 2020).

This model can provide an opportunity for you to:

- Think about how you work
- Analyse feelings and thoughts during specific experiences
- Acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses
- Review your practice and make improvements of the quality of your work
- Acknowledge how your actions impact the quality of services you provide to children and their families
- Identify and resolve problems in a professional manner
- Grow on a personal and professional level
- Encourage you to be open minded to experimenting with new ideas

(Kelly, 2015)

Source: Dye, 2011



Note: Although this model provides many benefits, it may not work for you. Follow the link below to view different types of models in order for you to develop an understanding of which method may suit you best:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vt0-2nucCMI>

What are the Barriers to reflective practice and how to overcome them?

Potential barriers of reflection and how to overcome them: There are many benefits to becoming a reflective practitioner, although in order create the best results of reflective practice we need to be aware of potential barriers and how to plan accordingly to overcome these barriers in order to continue effective reflective practice. Here is a list of the main barriers to reflection:

- **Lack of time**
- **Organisation**
- **Lack of skill**
- **Environment**
- **Motivation**
- **Yourself**

For further information about how to overcome these reflective barriers visit:
<https://lit.libguides.com/reflective-practice-tips/barriers>

(Limerick Institute of Technology, 2020; University of Cambridge, 2020)

Areas for reflection in Early Years settings:

- **Relationships** – reflecting on relationships with children, parents and colleagues in order for possible strengthening.
- **Environment**- reflection on the environment is vital to ensure it is safe, engaging and child centred.
- **Pedagogy** – reflecting on your own pedagogy is important so you understand your own teaching values and recognise any areas for development.
- **Direct Teaching and Assessment**- reflecting on your own teaching method should become habitual. Reflecting on children's understanding, level of engagement and specific needs can help develop an effective service.
- **Interactions and Observations in Play**- Observations during play are a great way to assess and reflect on whether children are displaying characteristics of effective learning.

(Houghton, 2017).

With a continuous cycle of reflecting, reviewing, adapting and improving; outstanding practice can be achieved (Houghton, 2017).

Element 3 Reflective log

<i>Brief description of the activity</i>	
Ages of children: 3-4 years of age Number of children per group: 10 Adults involved: 1 (myself). This specific activity was a science investigation on freezing and melting objects. The children and I went to the school kitchen and each group were given a plastic arctic animal. The children then made predictions as to what would happen if they put the animal in a tub of water and then put it in the freezer over night. The following day the children observed and discussed their findings and had the opportunity to observe the blocks of ice melting in the tuft spots within the classroom.	
<i>Nod/Amcan y gweithgaredd</i>	<i>Aim/Objective of the activity</i>
Making predictions by reflecting on previous experiences. Begin to use and understand simple scientific terms.	
<i>Eich rôl chi</i>	<i>Your role</i>
To lead the activity To gather the resources needed for the task. To complete a safety check of the kitchen before the lesson. To engage the children in a fun and interesting activity. To listen to and record the children's predictions. This activity was part our 'Frozen Kingdom' topic. Therefore, we discussed what animals would live in the arctic. To ensure that every child's predictions were heard and recorded. To encourage and model appropriate scientific language.	
<i>Positive aspects – why? How could these be developed further?</i>	
The children were very much engaged with the activity. They were excited to investigate what might happen to the animal/water. The children made fantastic predictions and liked the fact that I wrote down each child's ideas on the board. Thus, given the children confidence to voice more predictions due to the fact that every one's ideas were valued and listed. The children returned to class excited to share with their peers and other teachers on the activity whilst using the correct language that was modelled during the task. Parents commented on school communication app how excited their children were to see what happened to their animals the next day, therefore giving us feedback that the activity was engaging and fun. The timing was planned well. Each group had the same amount of time to complete the activity and all groups were completed in one day. This allowed us to complete the melting process the next day. The children were keen to see if their predictions were correct and spent a lot of their time the following day observing their melting ice block, which they found fascinating.	
<i>Challenging aspects – why? Link to your own practice.</i>	
I recorded each group session with an iPad, using a mixture of photos and videos. I also took a time lapse of the ice melting the next day. My intention was to put an iMovie together to recap on the activity with the children. The video would have also been shown to parents/ carers via our school seesaw app. The children were very excited to see their work on the white board. When I attempted to put the video together, I discovered that the iPads were not updated therefore the iMovie app could not be used. Also, the iPad I used	

were also an older version therefore the photos and videos could not be shared with other devices.

This was extremely disappointing for myself and the children.

I should have checked the available and working app's before I used this device to record on.

We had one staff iPad in the classroom with all the updated apps and sharing tools, although this was being used that particular day by another member of staff.

*What knowledge did **you** demonstrate?*

I used Siraj Blatchford's et. Al (2004) Sustained Shared Thinking method in which I learned at University. Using the following techniques:

- Respecting the child's voice
- Modelling thinking
- Encouraging further thinking
- Re-capping
- Speculating

I ensured all children were included by writing each of their predictions on the white board.

My time management was planned effectively to ensure I completed all groups in one day. I had to take into account, the time for each session to be completed, assembly and break times and the time it would take to walk to and from the kitchen. It was important that I carefully planned the timings as we were able to move on to the next stages of the investigation the following day.

Previous knowledge of age appropriate scientific language.

Good knowledge of the different abilities of the children in order to adapt the activity accordingly

*What skills did **you** demonstrate?*

- Good time management skills- ensuring the task was completed in one school day and each group had the same amount of time.
- Good organisational skills- good group organising, resources collected and ready before hand.
- Scaffolding appropriate scientific language
- The use of sustained shared thinking throughout the investigation

*Which values did **you** demonstrate?*

- Safety measures- making sure the kitchen was safe to use for example, no sharp objects on display, ovens were turned off, no spillages or tripping hazards on the kitchen floor before the children entered the work space.
- Inclusion – making sure every child was actively involved in the activity.
- Patience – the children were extremely excited during the activity. Quiet behaviour reminders were used whilst respecting their joy and excitement of being part of the activity.
- Listening – ensuring that myself and the other children respected and listened carefully to each child.

What could be done differently in future? Why?

After reflecting on my mistake with the technology, I approached our headteacher to ask if it were possible for our class to have additional updated staff iPads to ensure we can record our children's work and achievements.

We now have three teachers iPads and we always make sure we communicate who will be using the iPad to record activities and at what times to ensure the children's work can be recorded accordingly.

My colleagues and myself also check the iPads are in good working order before use.

The fact that the children responded positively to the activity along with the success of meeting the learning objectives, we as a team have planned to include this activity again into our summer term topic. Using of the ideas from the children. They decided that they would love to make their own ice lollies. This will be a chance to extend their knowledge of the freezing and melting process, whilst recapping on knowledge learned through this activity.

Element 4 Personal Development Plan

Overall goal for the future: To become a mindfulness and well being coach for children.				
Area for further development	Why?	How?	Who/Where?	When?
The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) course – a course designed for teaching assistants to support the emotional needs of children.	To deepen my understanding of how to help children identify, understand and manage their emotions.	Approach Headteacher of the school I work in to enquire about attending the course through school.	Head teacher, the school I am employed at	June 2020
Contact University of Wales Trinity St David about the Mindfulness and Well-being for Professional Practitioners programme.	To see how I would enrol on the course and to find out more details about the programme.	Email UWTSD and book an open day	University of St David, Carmarthen	Open day -June 2020 Enrol- 2021
Organise a meeting with Saffron Cooksey- Young People's Success Coach	Create a list of questions to ask Saffron Cooksey to develop insight of what is involved with having your own Coaching business. This would help with my understanding of what it takes to become a Mindfulness and Well-being coach.	Contact Saffron Cooksey and ask if a meeting is possible. Explain my intentions of the meeting. Organise an appropriate date to meet.	Saffron Cooksey. A meeting in person, online or over the phone.	June 2020
Organise an informal chat with Value Added Education.	Create a list of questions to ask Value Added to develop insight of what is involved with having your own training business. Value Added offer well-being training programmes to schools. This would help me to understand next steps I could potentially take.	Email the owners of Value Added and ask if a meeting is possible. Make my intentions clear. Organise an appropriate date to meet.	Value Added Education. A meeting in person, online or over the phone	June 2020

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