

What is reflection and reflective practice?

Reflection is a valuable attribute to have as a professional as it allows them to determine what can be done differently or better in order to improve their own professional development. Tarrant (2019) supports this stating that reflective practice allows them to become more aware and able to identify their strengths, weaknesses and areas they can develop. According to Schon (quoted in Aubrey and Riley, 2019, p. 181-194) and Brock (2014) there are two types of reflection, reflection in practice and reflection on practice. Schon (2016) implied that having the capacity to reflection on practice is to involve themselves in continuous learning. According to Schön (2016) reflection on practice is the ability to reflect on what has already happened considering what they would do differently if the situation was to occur again. This type of reflective practice is an opportunity to gain new understanding and inform better practice. Reflection in practice is the ability to reflect on a scenario while the scenario is ongoing and forces the practitioner to decide on the most appropriate solution for the situation. Being a reflective practitioner allows them to ensure that they're able to improve the quality of care they provide and strengthen their professional relationships. Brock (2014) puts particular emphasis on why reflective practice is important as an early year's practitioner suggesting that for reflective practice to be purposeful it needs to be meaningful and have a focus on the children and the families that they work with.

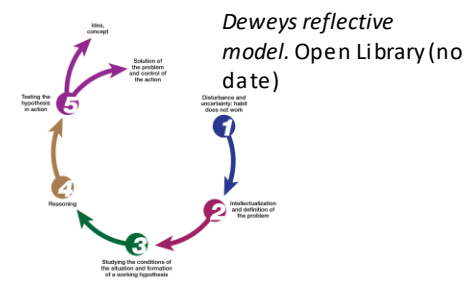
Reflection within professional practice

As a professional practitioner reflection is a valuable tool in order to further their professional development. As they are able to reflect on their experiences to gain further insight into their roles and issues which may arise day to day. Experiential learning is valued when planning activities for children to learn from, and it should be no exception when approaching developing professional practice, the best way for them to improve and build on their knowledge and judgment is through experience. Tarrant (2013) proposes that in order to develop as professional practitioners they need to be able to reflect, suggesting that sometimes they are unable to know what their own values are until they have an opportunity to stop and reflect on what they have said or done, why they might have approached it in the way that they have and the impacts it may have on the individuals in their care. Tarrant (2013) also suggests that as professionals they have a responsibility to ensure that children are provided with the utmost care and abundant opportunities to learn and develop holistically. So, reflecting on their own practice is paramount in order to determine what could be improved and how they can further their understanding in a way that will best support the individuals in their care. This is supported by Brock (2014) who suggests that reflective practice to be effective it needs to be meaningful and needs to consider the individuals in their care and their families. Reflection in professional practice provides an opportunity for them to become more aware of their actions, feelings values and makes them consider and evaluate how they approach each new scenario with the openness to improve and better their practice.

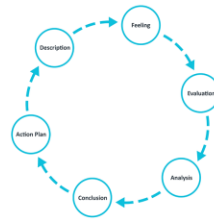
Reflective practice in early years settings

Applying reflective practice in an early year's setting allows professionals to ensure that they are providing sufficient care and support to the children and the families. For example, when observing a child within the setting to get an idea of their development and their learning journey. Reflecting on the findings from the child's observation does not just give them an opportunity to reflect on what stage of the journey the child is at but also what they could do to better support the child in their development, if they have the appropriate resources to support them, if there is any extra training or knowledge they could obtain in order to better fulfil that individual child's needs. But this is not always possible for a lot of settings due to lack of funding and the amount of staff as a lot of settings are struggling to hire and maintain good numbers of staff. Therefore, making it difficult to give staff further professional development opportunities such as courses and conferences as there is not enough staff to ensure they maintain the correct staff to children ratios. Early Years Alliance (2021) discusses the challenges employers in the early years have in recruiting staff one of the most prominent factors being that people were not applying. The national day nurseries association (2023) highlight how the lack of funding in early years settings are forcing closures of nurseries as a lot of nursery owners were unable to keep up with the ever-increasing costs of essential provisions such as food, electric etc which would make them unable to provide sufficient care to the children never mind fund further career development for their staff.

Brookfield (1995) suggests that the purpose of reflective practice in the early years is to enhance the quality of the children's and families' experiences. Stating that when practitioners reflect, they can enhance provision and practice by evaluating whether their efforts are having a positive impact. Meaningful learning requires the practitioner to reflect on new knowledge and linking it to existing knowledge to broaden their understanding and accommodating to new policies and information Moon (1999). According to Hallett (2013) it is important that the practitioner finds a healthy balance between reflection and self-criticism to avoid becoming too negative which can impact your career negatively. Birth to 5 Matters (2021) suggests that the act of reflection within the observation cycle allows us to respond appropriately to the findings of the reflection. Communication with all those involved with the care of the child enables us to gain better perspective on a case scenario and allows us to be reminded of the core values needed to be a professional practitioner. Some of these values include patience and professionalism, multi-agency working can sometimes cause conflicts or difficulties within the setting. However, being able to step back and reflect on their values and ensuring that their actions are aligned with those values, they are able to have better working relationships with their peers. Therefore, having more valuable and effective discussions and they are able to come back to what is important, which is the best interests of the child. Hallett (2013) also discusses how early years practitioners can apply Schon's (2007) reflective method, reflecting in practice when carrying an activity out with children and reflecting on practice afterwards considering theories that can help to enhance their practice. It is easy for practitioners to lose sight of why we do certain things as they become a daily routine, so reflective practice allows us to remember why we do what we do and what the importance of them is as well as tweaking and developing that provision for the children. Hallett (2013) proposes that for reflection to be meaningful it is important for us to reflect on a specific aspect of practice which could be identifying an issue, learning about said issue and amending or modifying that issue for the better. Dewey (1933) highlights the importance of being open-minded in reflection and being open to hearing other's viewpoints and perspectives. Tarrant (2013) and Hallett (2013) believe that reflection with our colleagues, children and their families we can problem solve, reason, we can also give and receive constructive feedback that will encourage us to reflect and understand how we can improve our practice. Tarrant (2013) believes that it is beneficial to reflect not just individually but also within groups within the setting, as it gives practitioners a safe working environment to reflect and develop. Therefore, being open minded in reflection allows them to be completely honest with themselves and question whether the choices we have made are ethical and whether or not they are ensuring that their provision is inclusive to each unique child.



NHSGGC
Practice
Education
2020)



Gibbs reflective cycle.
University of
Edinburgh (2023)

Theories and models of reflection

There are a variety of models and theories out there to help practitioners to carry out reflective practice. One of the most prominent being the Gibbs model of reflection. The Gibbs model of reflection originates from 1988 and was created by Gibbs to repeatedly reflect on a scenario but the method can also be applied to a standalone experience. Gibbs (2013) stated that the reasoning behind the reflective cycle was to support a practitioner's experiential learning. The model is comprised of 6 stages for the practitioner to consider these stages are description, feelings evaluation, analysis, conclusion and an action plan. This model of reflection gives practitioners the opportunity to dive deep into their feelings and their takeaways from the experience and outline a plan or a solution that will help them to improve their provision and practice.

Another effective model of reflection is Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. According to the University of Cambridge (2021) Kolb designed this model that focuses on broadening our knowledge through experiential learning. The cycle comprises of 4 stages which are: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. And the most effective way to use the model is to start with something that they have experienced before or an entirely new experience. The next step is to reflect on the experience identifying things that have arisen that may have not come up before so that they are able to move onto the next stage which is to develop their understanding based on the new information and determine the cause of it, then finally applying the new ideas to future experiences. Kolb (1984) likens it to the process of a child learning about hot and cold and how when a child touches something hot they learn very quickly not to repeat it.

The University of Cambridge (2021) also discusses the pros and cons of using reflective models, Pros being that it gives a practitioner that is new to the idea of reflective practice a good foundation to start with. As there is a clear structure to follow and the practitioner is aware of the things that they need to be considering in order to reflect effectively in a way that is going to further support their professional development and their practice. Therefore, leading to more meaningful and impactful practice to the children and families in their care. According to Brock (2014) a key pioneer in reflective practice particularly within the early years setting was John Dewey.

Dewey (2003) believed that reflection was an additional dimension to their thought process, stating that it was important for them to develop reflective practice as it provides everyone with the opportunity to take away the information from previous experiences to enable them to learn how to better their practice. Dewey (1859-1952) argued that without being a reflective practitioner the likelihood that they will approach their practice with prejudice, misinformed or outdated knowledge is increased. Therefore, as practitioners they should strive to be reflective in their work to ensure they are providing inclusive and respectful provision to children and their families free from any prejudice or discrimination while also ensuring they are catering to each individual child's needs. Brock (2014) supports this stating that tacit knowledge is improved by knowledge obtained from experience working with the children, working closely with the children particularly if they are a child's key worker, they can acquire an understanding about that child's individual holistic needs.

Therefore, allowing them to be able to highlight any issues or concerns that may arise with that child. An effective way of reflecting as a professional practitioner is to carry out a reflective account form. Reflective account forms are used across a wide range of disciplines to help employees reflect as part of their professional development. The reflective account forms originated from the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the nursing and midwifery council (2021) states that the reflective account form enables practitioners to work through a series of questions that encourage you to make note of the experience, reflect on the positives and negatives and help outline the lessons you have learnt which can be applied in the future in order to improve practice.

In conclusion, reflection is a valuable tool in improving professional development. Being a reflective practitioner will enable you to ensure that you are up to date with relevant updates in policies and curriculums, therefore ensuring that you are providing the utmost care to the children in your care. Reflection can provide an opportunity to reflect on whether you are providing the children with the appropriate provision to aid them in their development. The models of reflection that have been mentioned, give practitioners an effective starting point in their journey to becoming a reflective practitioner. As professionals in the early years, we should always want to broaden our knowledge and understanding to improve our practice being open to learning opportunities when they arise.

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