The importance of reflective practice as a professional practitioner

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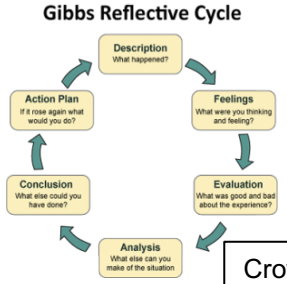
What is reflection and reflective practice?

Reflection is a key skill for all practitioners to have. Bolton (2010, quoted in Tarrant, 2013, p. 9) states that reflective practice is being able to examine what happened on an occasion then as a result being able to open ourselves up to reflect on the situation individually or with other practitioners and therefore being able to openly discuss our practice and ways to improve. Being able to reflect on ones own professional practice can help to identify what could be done differently or better and also enhance own professional knowledge. There are two different types of reflection according to Schon (quoted in Aubrey and Riley,2019, p. 181-194). Reflection in practice and reflection on practice. By carrying out reflection in practice practitioners are reflecting whilst in the situation. Schon believes that by professional practitioners carrying out reflection in practice there may be a risk that one could miss opportunities to reflect and evaluate in order to improve their knowledge and future planning. Whereas refection on practice is a higher level of reflection. Carrying out a planned activity with a purpose and reflecting on said activity once completed and therefore a practitioner will be able to identify what they could do differently in order to improve practice, develop skills further and record the thinking processes for future reference. Hallet (2013) states that by practitioners being reflective they are able to improve the care and practice that they provide by making informed decisions on whether the planning they apply is effective. University of Cambridge (2021) states that there is no right or wrong way to reflect. Reflection is very personal and there are many different ways to carry it out dependent on own circumstance or preference.



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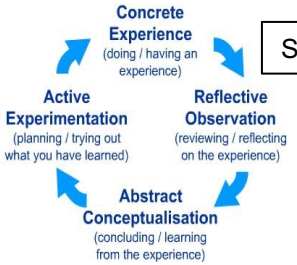


Simply psychology (2017)

Reflection within professional practice

As a professional practitioner reflection is important as by continually reflecting on own practice, we are then able to continuously improve and develop professionalism. By carrying out reflection professional practitioners are able to develop their knowledge through experience. According to Tarrant (2013) Professional practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that the upmost care and learning opportunities are available for all children. By applying a reflective approach to their work practitioners are more aware, in control and are able to see their own strengths and developmental needs in order to better their practice. Reflection needs to be used in everyday practice as a professional in order to improve own teaching. In order for reflection to be effective it needs to be meaningful so for a professional practitioner it would need to be related to their work with children within the early years (Brock, 2014).

According to Johns (2014) through practitioners carrying out reflection they learn to pay increased attention to own self within practice. Practitioners become more aware of their thinking, feelings and their response to situations. After time reflection will become a natural attribute within a practitioner's everyday practice and therefore be beneficial to providing the upmost in their profession.

As a professional practitioner as well as reflecting in order to improve their practice and knowledge, reflection is also used to ensure that the children within the setting are also gaining from the activities and curriculum that is being planned for them. Practitioners observe the children carrying out activities that have been planned in order for them to carry out reflection and assess their findings. When observing the children within the activity's practitioners are able to take note of many different things they see or hear and are then able to carry out reflection in order to identify the stage of a child's development, where they may need extra support, their likes and dislikes and many other things.

Reflection within the early years setting

Tarrant (2013) states that as well as practitioners carrying out self reflection it is also beneficial to carry out reflection within pairs or as part of a team within the setting. By doing so practitioners are able to support one another through the reflection process and it also creates a safe and professional working environment for reflection to take place. Being able to carry out reflection with colleagues that you trust will add a new depth to your professional and personal reflection that you are carrying out. Within a setting it is also possible for another professional practitioner to observe an activity that one is carrying out with children in order for you to then be able to reflect on their finding together in order to develop your professional practice. Within professional practice it is key to develop good relationships with both children and their families. Being able to speak to and involve parents or guardians about their child's development or behaviours within the setting is crucial to your role. Through good communication one would be able to involve parents in reflective processes in relation to their child. Parents would be able to reflect on situations at home and therefore the findings may be helpful when put together with findings within the setting in order to work together to create a plan that could best support the child and aid their development (Paige-Smith and Craft 2011).

Hallet (2013) believes that by reflecting with other colleagues, parents and children we are able to include the ability to problem solve and find solutions, reason, give constructive feedback and also receive feedback from others in order for us to then think in a reflective way and improve our provision and practice.

Models and theories of reflection

There are many different models of reflection these models can be used as a guide to help and support one to reflect. Although all the models are different, they all include similar stages although some may have more than others.

The Gibbs Reflective Cycle is one of the most famous models that practitioners use. The Gibbs reflective cycle was created in 1988 by Graham Gibbs and is made up of six stages to lead you through reflection although it is one of the more complex models. The University of Edinburgh (2020) published an article on the Gibbs reflective cycle and within the article they state that the cycle was originally created for use when reflecting repeatedly on a situation although it can be used for single experiences also. The Gibbs reflective cycles six stages are: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and lastly action plan. By reflecting on these in depth as a professional practitioner you would be able to critically evaluate exactly what it was that was being reflected on in order to learn and plan from the outcomes.

Kolb's Experiential learning cycle that was created in 1984 is another reflective model that is used as guide when carrying out reflection it is a smaller reflective cycle but is seen to be just as effective. This model contains only four stages and focuses on developing understanding through experiences. The four stages the Kolb has include are: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. According to this model it is key to begin with an experience this can either be something that has happened to us before or something new. Within the next stage one would then reflect on the experience and take note of anything that was perhaps good or something that could be done differently in order to improve for the next time. Once the reflective stage is complete one could then apply anything learnt to their practice this would then demonstrate what has been learnt as a direct result of reflection within practice (University of Cambridge, 2021).

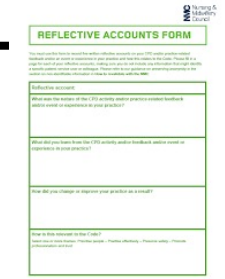
There are many other models of reflection available, some may suit an individual better than others. The models are a useful guide to use or a place to start when beginning to reflect. As one develops as a reflective practitioner you may use different methods which suit the situation better.

There are both pros and cons to using reflective practice models. According to University of Cambridge (2021) some of the pros include:

By using the reflective models they offer a structure to follow, this can be helpful for a practitioner that is new to reflective practice. The models also provide a starting point if one is unsure on where to begin, and they also help guide practitioners through the reflection process to assess all levels of a situation. Although the reflective models can be very helpful there are also cons to using them. The reflective models imply that a series of steps must be followed in order for reflection to be beneficial and that is not completely true. Within everyday practice the models may not always apply, practitioners may need to adapt their reflection in order to suit a situation. Reflection is a continuous process and practitioners may be able to work off reflection work that they have previously carried out without the need to carry out each individual stage again.

Within Schon's theory he believes that skilled practitioners are reflective when they use their experience, knowledge and understanding of theories in order to develop their own new theories. Schon developed this theory by suggesting that the way in which a practitioner deals with an unexpected situation reveals their ability to reflect in action by making any necessary adjustments to their practice. They are then able to later reflect on the situation and the effectiveness of their actions in order to build on and develop their skills as practitioners (Schon no date, quoted in Aubrey and Riley, p. 189). Schon (1987) places an emphasis on the importance of recognising the knowledge that a practitioner has as being key to the development of the workplace. He believes that a practitioners knowledge in action is tacit knowledge, this knowledge is both automatic and intuitive. By applying this to any given situation it will form the basis for any future reflection which will then led to improvements within practice. Brock (2014) states that tacit knowledge is developed from knowledge gained through experience with working with children as well as training. When working with children and building up relationships practitioners get to know children's personalities and their needs. They are therefore able to recognise when maybe "something is not quite right" with a child although they may not be able to explain why as it is through their tacit knowledge.

When carrying out reflection as a practitioner it may be useful to use a reflective accounts form, they may be given to you by your setting in order for you to be able to document your reflection process. They can be helpful as you are able to follow the steps and note down details of the experience one is reflecting on. Reflection accounts forms are typically brief they allow you to document a written description of an experience, note down your actions and also include what went well and what did not go so well and anything you may have learnt for the future. They are also helpful to keep within your reflection folder in order to look back if needed.


REFLECTIVE ACCOUNTS FORM

(NHSGGC Practice Education 2020)

In conclusion it is suggested that by following the above methods one should be able to begin their journey of reflection. Reflection is a key skill for all practitioners to have whilst working within childcare settings, by carrying out reflection as a practitioner you are ensuring that the upmost care and learning is provided to all children. Reflection can be carried out in order to better own knowledge and can aid professional development. Practitioners can also use reflection within the workplace as a way of understand children, their developmental stage, needs and also of a way of identifying their likes and dislikes in order to aid future planning.

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