Reflective Practice; In the Early Years

WHAT IS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND WHY IT IS USED?

Reflective practice is a strategic method. It is used by people to reflect on their practice in their areas of profession. In accordance with Dr Shatz (2022), Reflective practice enables people to recognise the positives and negatives in their previous practice so mistakes that may have been made can be identified. By evaluating those mistakes that have been made, improvements can be implemented to enhance and develop the skills people need in their areas of practice.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN THE EARLY YEARS

Reflective practice is essentially key in the early years as it does not just benefit the practitioners themselves, it is also beneficial for the children and their developmental milestones.

Reflective practice in the early years is not just about self-reflection in practice, it involves the holistic developmental needs of the children. For example, if a child within a setting is showing signs of having learning difficulties. Reflecting on their behaviours in practice can enhance early intervention and prevention.

Jackson (2022) believes that there are 4 main reasons to why reflective practice is Important in the Early Years. Reflective practice in the early years enables practitioners to support the holistic developmental needs of the children. Reflecting on practice can enhance this as practitioners are reflecting on what a child is able to do as well as where the children's developmental needs are regarding their age. This encourages practitioners to evaluate ways the children developmental needs can be developed to meet the needs depending on their age. Self-reflection on practice and the profession is important in the early years, as it encourages practitioners to learn critically about their own actions and behaviours. Practitioners are known to inspire children. Therefore, reflecting on the actions and behaviour of a person can encourage good role modelling for the children within a setting. In the early years reflecting on practice is important as it encourages practitioners to effectively support the children's families as well as the children. The support given to families from the practitioners can reflect on communication, which is essentially key. Reflecting on the communication when supporting families can rely on the actions made from a practitioner. In the early years, reflecting on practice is important as it enhances practitioners to become trustworthy. Reflecting on practice in the early years can encourage people to learn from their mistakes. This gives the practitioners the ability to take responsibility when taking action to improve positively.

By taking consideration of the feedback and the constructive criticisms that have been given from a conversation with colleagues and friends when reflecting on practice or the person's job role, it encourages practitioners to critically think of their practice from other people points of view so positive change can be implemented. It enables practitioners to learn and share knowledgeable ideas that will enhance practitioners to become physically and intellectually better educated at everything they do within their work setting. "Reflecting in an informal discussion with critical friends and colleagues can enable you to see different perspectives and can enable examination of taken for granted situations" (Brock, 2014, p. 28).

Reflecting on how previous activities went and reflecting on the children's interests within an Early Years setting during a conversation with colleagues, enables practitioners to share their ideas on what they think of the situation. It encourages practitioners to share with each other what the children's interests are to ensure the needs of the children are being met through activities that are implemented. Reflecting and evaluating on how the activity went and how children were interested in the activity can enhance better outcomes when doing the activity within practice again, children may become more interested than they did the previous activity as their interested are considered and implemented.

Moon (2006) cited in Hallet (2013) Reflective Early Years practitioner book, believes that being a reflective practitioner is a quality that practitioners naturally own. It refers to the physical actions of the person rather than how their mind thinks. Practitioners are consistently reflecting on their practice without even realising they are doing it. if something didn't go so well in previous experiences, practitioners will automatically take physical actions to make the positive change, without even thinking about it first. For example, if children within an activity that involves painting and children are not interested with the colours that have been provided, practitioners will actively engage in changing the paints straightaway regarding the child's choices of paint.

THEORETICAL MODELS OF REFLECTION

Theoretical Models are described as a structure of guidance that have been put together by academic researchers.

According to Jackson (2022) Using theoretical models as practitioners when reflecting doesn't change a person's profession but enhances them to become active learners. This means becoming a learner who critically thinks about ways of how their practice can always be improved, to become better at what they already do within practice.

In correspondence with reflective practice whether it is self- reflection or on practice, some of the theoretical models that are referred to by many people include,

- The Gibbs Reflective Cycle
- Donald A Schon's theory of reflective practice
- Kolb's Experiential Learning

eLearning Industry (2011)

Expert Program Management (2009)

The 'Gibbs Reflective Cycle' and Kolb's model of reflection 'Experiential Learning' are both long processes and are beneficial for long term developments and goals. However, Schon's model of reflection is quick and efficient for immediate use when reflecting during an experience or on practice as well as after the experience had happened.

Gibbs Reflective Cycle

Graham Gibbs had created the 'Gibbs Reflective Cycle' in 1988. It is a reflective model that enables people to reflect and learn from previous experiences and practice following a systematic cycle. The 'Gibbs Reflective Cycle' systematic cycle enables people to reflect in 6 stages.

The first stage of the systematic cycle involves and focuses on describing what had happened throughout a certain situation or within the event. This enables people to thoroughly think about the situation itself, so they can have a better understanding of why they are required to reflect. Stage 2 requires people to focus their attention on how they felt during the situation or experience. This encourages people to acknowledge their feelings so they can understand the reasons for why reflecting is needed and why they felt the way they did during the situation, to identify what can be changed to become better. The third stage of 'Gibbs Reflective Cycle' is when people are enabled to identify their faults throughout the situation or in past experiences and critically evaluating the positives and negatives of the situation. Once the strengths and the weaknesses have been identified and evaluated, the fourth stage of 'Gibbs Reflective Cycle' requires people to analyse ways improvements can be made to develop new and old skills. Stage five of the 'Gibbs Reflective Cycle' encourages people to conclude how those improvements can be made. This enables people to develop an understanding of how their goals are going to be achieved. Lastly the sixth stage, involves people to create an action plan. This encourages people to focus on their improvements that are needed to be developed and put those skills into action following the plan people have created.

Gibbs reflective cycle enables people to physically learn from their faults by creating an action plan. (Expert Program Management, 2009). By creating an action plan, this will encourage people to focus on what skills are needed to be developed so they can work on those skills for better practice within their professions.

Kolb's Experiential Learning

Kolb 1984, Cited on the Education Technology by Dr Kurt (2020) says that learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience". Exploration in different experiences enhances people to learn new things, this is where knowledge is gained and is referred to as learning.

Kolb's Experiential Learning cycle is similarly like the Gibb's Reflective Cycle as they are both separated into stages. However, Kolb's Experiential Learning cycle is only in 4 stages but is divided into 2 parts. Concrete Experience and Reflective Observations are the first 2 stages of Kolb's Learning Cycle and are combined for the first part of the model, this requires people to become active learners. This is when people are actively learning during the experience in the present moment. Abstract conceptualisation and Active Experimentation are the third and fourth stages of the cycle and are both combined for the second part of the theory, and this is about evaluating the intellectual knowledge gained and how those skills are going to be implemented and put into action. The second part of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is about critically thinking of the future, the plan of action that are intended to be implemented in the future for better practice.

Stage 1; Concrete Experience is when people are needed to actively become participated and being hands on within an activity, so that new skills and understandings can be acknowledged to encourage people to actively learn from experimenting in different experiences.

Stage 2; Reflective Observation is where people are required to acknowledge and reflect on their experience to identify what has gone well and what did not go so well. Observing what did not go well during the experience can enhance people to identify where they had gone wrong, so that improvements can be made to ensure the same mistakes that were made in the past does not happen again.

Stage 3; Abstract Conceptualisation. This stage of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle requires people to conclude and evaluate on how the specific improvements can and are going to be made. This encourages people to critically think about the skills they already have and find ways those skills can be developed and discover new skills that can enhance better practice in the future,

Stage 4 of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is when the new and developed skills are implemented. This is where people will actively put into action their proposed changes to their skills to enhance their goals to be achieved for better practice and positive outcomes.

Donald A Schon's Reflective model

Donald A Schon is another theorist that also created a reflection model to support people when reflecting. Donald A Schon's theoretical model on reflection is slightly different to both Gibb's reflective cycle and Kolb's method of reflection. The difference between the models is that Gibb's and Kolb's models of reflection are created in a structured cycle and enables people to reflect on their practice and experiences in stages. Whereas, In accordance with the Nursing Answers. Net website (2003), Schon's model of reflection is simply separated into just two important sections. Schon's model on reflection is referred to as reflecting whilst in action and reflecting on action when reflecting on experience or the practice of a person. Schon's model on reflection is probably known to be the quickest to complete. The intentions of the first part of Schon's reflective model 'Reflection- in – action' initially enables people to critically think about what is going on throughout the experience in the present moment and adhering to the changes that are needed to be changed straightaway. This is to ensure the experience and the practice of a person runs as smoothy as it possibly can go. The second part of Schon's reflective model 'reflection- on - action' intentions allow people to reflect on their past experiences in their own time after the experiences had happened rather than reflecting on the spot and making the changes there and then. This enables people to critically think about their long-term goals that can be developed and enhanced in the future for better practice within a persons profession and self-practice.

Asset Wisdom Empowerment AWE (2021)

Conclusion

In conclusion to this briefing paper on reflective practice, reflecting either on yourself or on your practice in your profession is extremely important and should be acknowledged consistently. It encourages people to learn from their past experiences actively and critically. This enhances them to develop as an active learner so people can become stronger and greater at whatever they do in the future. Reflecting on practice can allow a person to learn more about their skills as well as encourage people to gain more knowledge to become better at what they do and enhance people to become higher educated within their job role and develop higher within their work setting.

REFERENCE LIST;

Asset Wisdom Empowerment AWE. (2021) *Reflective Practice- What does it really mean*? [Diagram]. Available at:https://asset-wisdom.com/news/reflective-practice-what-does-it-really-mean/ (Accessed: 18 October 2022)

Brock, A. (2015) *The Early Years Reflective Practice Handbook.* Oxon: Taylor and Francis Group.

eLearning Industry. (2011) *Using Kolb's Learning Styles To Create Engaging Custom eLearning course* [Diagram]. Available at: https://elearningindustry.com/using-kolbs-learning-styles-engaging-custom-elearning-courses (Accessed: 12 October 2022).

Expert Program Management. (2009) *Gibbs Reflective Cycle* [Diagram]. Available at: https://expertprogrammanagement.com/2019/05/gibbs-reflective-cycle/ (Accessed: 10 October 2022).

Expert Programme Management (2009) Gibbs Reflective Cycle. Available at: https://expertprogrammanagement.com/2019/05/gibbs-reflective-cycle/ (Accessed: 10 October 2022).

Hallet, E. (2013) *Reflective Early Years Practitioner.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Jackson, L. (2022) 'Reflective practice in the Early Years: 3 activities for your next meeting', *Blossomeducational* [blog]. 7 June. Available at: https://blossomeducational.com/blog/reflective-practice-in-the-early-years-3-activities-for-your-next-team-meeting

Dr Kurt, S. (2020) *Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Learning Styles.* Available at: https://educationaltechnology.net/kolbs-experiential-learning-theory-learning-styles/ (Accessed: 11 October 2022).

Nursing Answers.net (2003) *The Schon Reflective Model.* Available at: https://nursinganswers.net/reflective-guides/schon-reflective-model.php (Accessed: 17 October 2022).

Dr Shatz, I. (2022) *Reflective practice: Thinking about the way you do things.* Available at: https://effectiviology.com/reflective-practice/ (Accessed: 6 October 2022).

Ahmad, T. and Singh, H (2020) 'Working in the Early Years- What makes a good practitioner', *Kiddisafe* [Blog]. 23 July. Available at: https://www.kiddisafe.co.uk/working-in-early-years-what-makes-a-good-practitioner/ (Accessed: 19 October 2022). 4

Children's Workforce Development Council (2010) *Common Core of skills and knowledge for the children's and young people's workforce.* Available at: https://foundationyears.org.uk/files/2015/02/Common-core.pdf (Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Cole, J. *et al.* (2001) *Helping young children learn through activities in the Early Years.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Dunhill, A. (2009) 'What is communication? The process of transferring information', *Effective Communication and Engagement with Children and Young people, their families and carers*. Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd. 5

Early Years Careers (2016) *Childcare providers working in partnership with Multi Agencies.* Available at: Childcare Providers Working In Partnership With Multi Agencies - Early Years Careers (Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Early Years Alliance (2003) *Information sharing and data protection.* Available at: Information sharing and data protection | early years alliance (eyalliance.org.uk) (Accessed: 27 October 2022).

Gasper, M. (2015) *A critical companion to Early Childhood - Professional Practice and Early Childhood Today.* 55 City Road: SAGE Publications. 1

Houston, E. (2019) *The Importance of positive relationships in the workplace.* Available at: https://positivepsychology.com/positive-relationships-workplace/ (Accessed: 22 October 2022). 7

Longford County Childcare Committee. (2017) Professional Practice in the Early Years, *Longford ccc* [Blog]. 5 May. Available at: https://longfordchildcare.ie/professional-practice-early-years/ (Accessed: 19 October 2022). 2

Little Learners. (2022) *Planning in the Moment: EYFS.* [Video]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osIwlJXmEtk (Accessed: 25 October 2022).

MA Education (2015) *Positive Relationships.* Available at: https://www.earlyyearseducator.co.uk/features/article/positive-relationships (Accessed: 25 October 2022).

Mordue, J.S. Watson, L. and Hunter, S. (2020) *How to thrive in professional practice: A self care handbook.* St Albans: Critical Publishing Ltd. 3

Nursery Resources (2019) The *Importance of Communication With Parents in EYFS.* Available at: https://www.nurseryresources.org/articles/parents-as-partners/communication-with-parents/ (Accessed: 21 October 2022).

NSPCC Learning (2022) *Safeguarding and child protection in schools.* Available at: https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection-schools (Accessed: 27 October 2022).

NSPCC Learning (2019) *Multi-agency working.* Available at: Multi-agency and interdisciplinary working | NSPCC Learning (Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Surrey County Council (2022) *Communication and language in the EYFS.* Available at: https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/childcare-professionals/early-years-foundation-stage/communication-and-language-in-the-eyfs (Accessed: 22 October 2022). 6

Sword, R. (2021) *Why is Child Development So Important in Early Years?* Available at: https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/child-development-in-early-years/ (Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Unicef (1992) *How we protect children's rights with the UN Convention on the rights of the child.* Available at: https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/?sisearchengine=284&siproduct=Campaign_G_02_Our_Work (Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Unicef (2019) *The Four Principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.* Available at: https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/four-principles-convention-rights-child (Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Queensland Government (2022) *Transitions in the early years.* Available at: https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/transitions (Accessed: 28 October 2022).

Welsh Government (2015) *Curriculum For Wales: Foundation Phase Framework – The developing child.* Available at: https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/foundation-phase-framework-revised-2015.pdf (Accessed: 28 October 2022).