

This briefing paper is a guide for practitioners to follow to improve their reflective practice as a professional practitioner.

### **What is reflective practise?**

Working in the early year's practitioners must reflect on their practise in order to improve on their professional practice. Reflective practise is when a practitioner will evaluate their practice by looking back and seeing what they can do to improve for the future. Kierkegaard states 'life can only be understood backwards but must be lived forwards' (Kierkegaard,2022). This means practitioners must teach using their knowledge and understanding but reflect in order to improve their practice by looking back. Reflective practice is done every day without individuals realising. It can be done using different methods, some may reflect on a positive outcome or others may concentrate on a situation where they found difficult. Once understanding what needs to be improved practitioners will apply this to future work (HCPC, 2021). This method allows professionals to look back at their practise and improve to become better practitioners which will not only benefit themselves but also benefits the children, parents, and workers around them. (Pacey, 2016).

## **Reflective practice.**

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### **Reflection in an early year setting**

In the early years setting there are many ways practitioners can reflect. However, in order to reflect practitioners must be willing to look back at practice and identify improvements. A theorist called John Driscoll believes "reflective practice takes both time and dedication" (Janse, 2020). Each professional must be motivated to make change within their practice to benefit themselves as well as the people around them. Self-reflection is just as important as reflection in a team. Practitioners should work in a team to reflect with each another. Reflection in a team is a brilliant way to develop professional practice in the workplace. When reflecting with others it is important to highlight the individuals' skills but also how they can improve. Sometimes, professionals may not see where they need to improve but may be obvious to others. Reflection in a team builds relationships in a workplace. Professionals will be able to talk to each and build their practice together. This will allow them to trust each other. Trust will help build a positive environment meaning everyone will have a better work ethic. The team will feel comfortable to ask questions and share the ideas to improve. (Wong,2020)

### **Reflective form**

A reflective form is a tool practitioners can use in a childcare setting. This helps practitioners to document an experience and analyse it in depth. The form is a simple layout and easy to follow. It has questions on it where practitioners can answer. One question says, "how did you change or improve your practice as a result." This question allows them to make adjustments to their practise. Practitioners can repeat using the form to develop their practice. Every time a practitioner needs to reflect, they can fill in the form and look back at past forms to improve. In setting, all practitioners can keep the forms and help reflect as a team.

### **Tacit knowledge**

Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is gained through past experiences, individuals will use their intuition to do something they have done before or do daily. They may find it difficult to explain what they did because it comes to them naturally (Oragui, 2020). "Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing in practice, most of which is tacit." For example, driving a car, the more practise and experience the better driver they become. Some drivers may not be able to tell you how they do certain things when driving. When a driver must stop behind a car they will know when to start braking and eventually stop behind the car leaving enough space. The driver uses their intuition and past experiences to know when it is the correct time to stop. After doing this constantly the more tacit knowledge they will gain.

Many years ago, a women conducted a piece of research. Her name was Beth Crandell. Beth Crandell interviewed nurses about their tacit knowledge who worked in an intensive care unit. These nurses would be able to identify if a baby was developing sepsis before test results were given back. When Beth Crandall asked how they knew they found it difficult to respond. However, once she changed the question, they could answer the different cues they noticed whilst using their intuition and experience when diagnosing the child. The nurses found it difficult to tell Beth Crandell how they could diagnose sepsis because when it happened, they used their intuition and experience. This meant they used their tacit knowledge. After working with children for years the nurses would see lots of babies with the infection so as a result, they could use their tacit knowledge and diagnose the children based on how they were. (Klein,2018).

## Models

There are many models in today's society that practitioners can follow as a guide. One example of a model is Gibbs model of reflection. In 1988 he produced a reflective cycle. His cycle was made up of six stages. The reflection could be a new experience or an experience which the person has experienced before. The six main headings were:

- **Description**

This heading is about evaluating what happened. For example, here a practitioner would write what happened in detail saying where and when and with who.

- **Feelings**

Feelings is a huge part of Gibbs cycle. This section is for practitioners to think back and remember how they felt during this experience. It is important here to write how they felt throughout the experience as well as before and after. Practitioners could also talk about how others felt as well as their self.

- **Evaluation**

This stage is about evaluation, this is when the individual will think back to the experience and think about the positive and negative outcomes. It is important that the practitioner is honest about the experience so that they can get the best outcome of reflection. It will also help the individual if they document how others did also. This could show if all the practitioners had the same method and whether it worked well or not.

- **Analysis**

When analysing the practitioner must look back to the experience and think about what helped the situation or made it difficult. For example, practitioners can use models to help.

- **Conclusion**

This point allows the individual to conduct a conclusion. This should state what the professional can do differently next time for example skills and how they can use them to improve their practice. If something went wrong the practitioner should include here what they can do for this not to happen again.

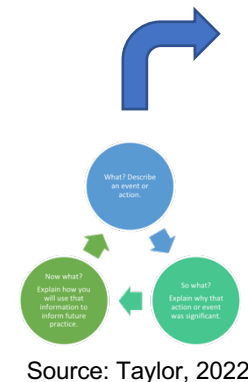
- **Action plan**

Finally, an action plan which would state what the practitioner is going to do to change their future practice. This is a great model for practitioners to follow as it allows them to think about each stage in depth. An action plan at the end of the stages is a great way to write down the improvement and how it can apply to real practice.

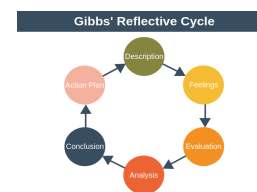
(Mind tools, 2022) (Expert Program Management, 2018)

With every model there are positive and negatives. Everyone will have different views on models. On the one hand every model there is a structure for practitioners to follow. This provides a structure for professionals to follow. It will also show when the process is complete so that the professionals will know that it is finished.

On the other hand, in practice today the models have a certain structure that needs to be followed in a certain way and professionals today may not need to start the process at the beginning. Also, every model doesn't apply to every situation in a childcare setting.



Source: Taylor, 2022.



Source: Expert Program Management, 2018.

Another example of a model is called Driscoll's model. It is made up of three sections: What? So what? Now what? The cycle must be followed in that order. The first section what? Should be about what happened in the experience. This section is all about what the person did, if anyone was there and if the experience was a positive or negative experience. The next step is so what? This stage is about how the person felt, how the person handled the situation...Lastly the final section is now what. This is the last part where practitioners must evaluate and state what they can do to make improvements. For example, where did it go wrong? what would you do differently in future practice? This would help practitioners make a plan and apply it to their practice. There are many benefits to Driscoll's reflective cycle such as the cycle allows practitioner to evaluate and apply it to real practice. It can also support the practitioner and other colleagues because it reflects on everyone involved. The cycle allows professionals to gain a better understanding on different experiences they may have not experienced before. (Janse, 2020) (Taylor, 2022)

### **What theories support reflection?**

There are many theorists who believe reflection is important in professional practice in the early years. Schon is a theorist who believes there are two processes in reflection. One is reflecting in practice and the other is reflecting on practice. Although they both sound similar they are different processes practitioners will do. Reflecting in practice is when they will think about the experience as they are doing it. Reflecting on practice is when they will reflect but after they have done the experience. He believes the reflective process and behaviour of a practitioner expands their professional knowledge and practice. Schon came up with the phrase 'professional artistry'. This is when an individual has enough knowledge and skills to be able to reflect in and on practice. Schon and Dewey are theorists who both believe reflection is a problem-solving task. Dewey believes practitioners must be open minded in order to reflect. This means practitioners should identify ways to improve and accept feedback from work colleagues and see it as a positive thing. If they do not reflect on their practice Dewey stated their practice would become "prejudice, uniformed or outdated thinking". (Hallet, 2013) (Brock, 2014)

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, practitioners must reflect to improve their practice. This can be done in many ways in the early years settings. There are many theorists and models to follow to support practitioners. Communication is a key part of reflection. Practitioners should reflect to gain confidence and more knowledge when teaching. It will benefit the individual and everyone around them. In today's society professional practice must constantly be reviewed because laws and legislation are always changing to allow the best outcome for each child.

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