

Reflective Practice – Briefing Paper

Within this briefing paper, I will be looking at what reflective practice is and the importance of it and why it is used effectively within early years settings with professional practitioners. Whilst also looking at theorists who have developed and used models for people to understand the importance of reflecting and why we do it.

According to Pacey (2016), reflective practice is having the ability to reflect on one's actions and having an opportunity to think about what can be done to correct something yet repeating what has gone right, and it allows one to make links from the different experiences in order for one to make excellent progress in the future. Reflective practice was developed in disciplines such as social working and teaching as a way to learn from life experiences and as stated by University of Cambridge (2021) people that work in these sectors are likely to think about their encounters with children or patients and take an understanding of how these encounters worked and what can be taken away from it as reflective practice is known as being an act of thinking about or experiences and how we are able to learn from them in the future.

Educators are able to achieve the best outcomes by knowing to reflect on what they do, why they do it, and how they do it and how they can base this new knowledge into improving their practice, according to reflective practice in the early years (2010). Through reflection and improvement, practitioners will find that overall, there will be better outcomes for children, with benefits such as how their individual needs will be met, and they will have the suitable resources they need to achieve their best outcome. Not only will children benefit from reflective practice but parents and carers too as they will benefit from having a reassurance that their children are being cared for by educators who are always improving their quality of care and want the best outcome for every child. As well as educators, parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's development and learning and working with children also means working with carers and parents and to work on a long-term outcome for children. It is also a time to build on relationship with the family of the child and gaining their trust and respect by working with their child, according to Working with Parents, Carers and Families in the Early Years : The Essential Guide(2016). This book also states that staying in touch as an early year's educator and a parent is key in order for a professional practitioner to do their job effectively whilst also ensuring not to put additional pressure on the parents as it allows links to be built with families and both will have mutual understanding of the child's outcome. The early years reflective handbook (2014) compares the learning of becoming a reflective practitioner to being a butterfly as new ways of thinking often requires changing the way one is used to, yet this change will result in a more advanced state.

Reflective practice is used by practitioners in the early year's settings such as teachers, nursery staff, social workers, along with many others. Building relationships with children, parents and colleagues is essential to a reflective practitioner as children learn better when they know they are content and cared for and that practitioners spend time getting to know every child individually and it is important to reflect on each relationship with the children and if anyone needs to be reflected upon to be stronger. Taking the time to showing an interest in the child and remembering the things they like and their hobbies and to play with them and talk to them helps to build a stronger relationship between child and practitioner. In addition to this, stated by the early years staff room (2017) building a strong relationship with parents and using a variety of communication methods is key as parents can work on at home what is going on in the classroom and work on how to change things or how they can better things from home, and this will reflect on the child's behaviour in the classroom.

In order to use reflective practice within early years settings, we must think about what we know, and how things work and what needs to change and ask questions such as what needs to be improved, how will we improve on these, and what changes would we like to see in the future. We must also think about the success we see within children and celebrate it and acknowledge all things that have gone well. Dr Helen Edwards (no date) also encourages the use of technology in reflective practice and by doing things such as using visual and audio communication to use with children who may need to reflect on certain aspects of their development in order for it to become stronger.

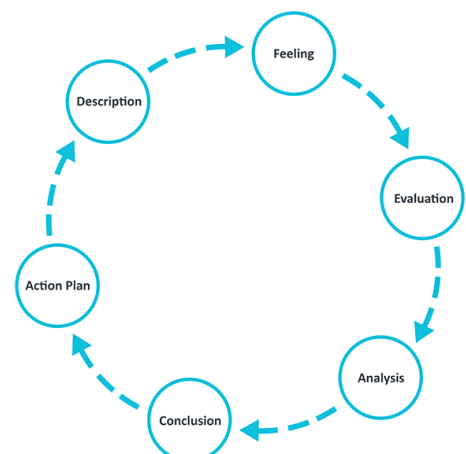
In order to become a reflective practitioner, some may find using a diary or a journal helpful in order to keep a note of any thoughts, feelings and personal opinions one may have during an experience that has happened within an early years setting. If a record is kept of a situation, it is an opportunity to think and reflect on the situation that has happened and think about why it happened and what did someone do about it. According to the process of Reflective Practice (2019) the journal may include information such as context, details and outcomes of the situation and this allows one to reread over situations that may have gone wrong in certain ways and review how things have progressed.

Gibbs' reflective cycle

To many, Gibbs' reflective cycle is a more in-depth version of Boud's triangle and although it uses the same reflective pattern, stages are broken down into smaller stages in order to have a more in-depth reflective model and a deeper understanding of the model. According to The University of Edinburgh (2020) this model is an efficient way of working through an experience whether it be an experience that happens frequently or one that has not happened before.

Gibbs' reflective cycle was developed to give structure to learning from experiences and it is based on a six-stage approach which leads from describing the situation that happened through to the conclusion and taking into consideration what needs to change for future events. The six stages of Gibbs' reflective cycle are;

1. Description
To understand what happened in the situation one should clearly outline the experience and give a description that is detailed as fine as possible with contextual information. Helpful questions to include into the description would be when and where did the situation happen? And what was the outcome of the situation?
2. Feelings
During this stage, one must look back and explore any feelings or thoughts they had about the situation that occurred and to question how might these



feelings have impacted the situation? It is important to be honest with how one felt whether the feelings were negative or positive as strategies to overcome these barriers can be implemented once the feelings have been identified.

3. Evaluation

One must consider, in this stage, to evaluate how the situation was handled and to weigh out the positives of the situation along with the negatives and be honest about the areas that need to be developed and why things did not work out like they planned.

4. Analysis

In this stage of Gibbs' reflective cycle, there is a chance to think about every aspect of the situation which may be crucial, and this must include all of the important positive and negative points. The earlier stages of the cycle have been reflecting on the details of what happened during the situation and now we can take meaning from it and make sense of the situation.

5. Conclusions

During the conclusion, summarisation can take place of what has been learnt from this situation and to understand what changes could have been done in order to change the situation how will this better future outcomes. If the action ended in a positive outcome, then this needs to be recognised and to take the same direction in the future to receive a similar outcome. If the situation was a negative one, then consideration must be taken as to what needs to change in order for it to become successful.

6. Action plan

The action plan is a guide to the future and is crucial to identify what will have to improve in order to change the outcome of a similar situation that may occur in the future. It is helpful to think about past situations and how one will act differently from that situation in order to not only plan differently what will be done differently but to ensure that it will happen, and it will be successful.

Schön's 'Reflection-in-action' and 'Reflection-on-action'.

According to Dr. Charlotte Meierdirk (2017), Reflection-in-action is reflection during the 'doing' stage which is carried out during the practice, and it is seen as an efficient method of reflection as when something is happening it allows one to change and react differently at that time and can think about what they're doing, as they're doing it.

An example of Schön's reflection-in-action is if an educator is teaching a classroom full of students and they are aware that the students are not understanding or responding to what is being taught to them then reflection-in-action allows the educator to think on their feet as to why this is happening and what can they do at that moment to change the situation.



Reflection-on-action involves reflection on how can practice be developed after it has happened. The importance of reflecting back is important to Schön, D.A (1987) "in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome." Reflection-on-action will encourage ideas of what needs to change in the future in order to make the practice successful and this requires a deep thought to understand how the change will happen and why it needs to happen.



An example of Schön's reflection-on-practice is to understand why the students did not understand the topic and to consider all the different causes and options that could have led to this and to conclude what needs to happen next in order for the students to understand what is being taught to them.



Conclusion

Reflective practice is an important aspect of a professional practitioner's life who work within early years settings. Gathering new evidence and reviewing the evidence we have provides us with the information we need to make change. By reflecting on what we see and learning on a day to day basis, we are always learning and always wanting to encourage change in order for children to have successful futures and through always learning we become more experienced and a more knowledgeable practitioner.

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