The Significance of Reflective Practice to facilitate professional development in the early years workforce.

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What is Reflective Practice?

To reflect on your practice is to look back critically at your actions in the workplace and evaluate what was successful, unsuccessful and how you felt then use this holistic view of the event to improve your future practice. (HCPC 2021) Reflection is essential to Early Years professionals and will impact every part of your daily practice and may even result in wider changes in your setting and the policies within it.
Colwell et al, (2015) stress the importance of Reflective practice as a continuous process where the practitioner must monitor and evaluate their actions, thoughts and behaviours regularly in order to develop new strategies and ideas.
Bassot (2016) adds to this definition by informing us the goal of Reflection is to continuously access your knowledge and skills to ensure you remain fit for purpose as a professional.

Who should reflect?

All Early Years professionals should be using a model of reflection as part of their personal and professional development. Reflection is an essential part of the planning cycle that Early Years Practitioners will need to ensure they are providing appropriate opportunities and experiences in the setting. This view is supported by Barber and Sharon (2010), who discuss the importance of good observations being regularly reflected on to check if what you are doing is effective or if any further training or provision is needed to maintain the effectiveness.

Professional feedback is a good aid for reflection (Griffiths 2017) however, The Health & Care professionals council warns up that it cannot be a substitute for reflection alone, (HCPC, 2021) the practitioner needs to be able to analyse their feedback in order to use it as part of their reflective cycle and professional development.

Why Reflective Practice is important.

There are many reasons why being a Reflective Practitioner is so important, reflection can help you identify areas of good practice that you would like to hone and develop, and it can also help you spot issues in the way you behave or feel in challenging situations or identify negative patterns and enable you to make appropriate changes that can benefit you and the people you work with and prevent past mistakes from reoccurring.
Reflective Practice has been credited with the improvement of the quality of teaching in schools by Estyn Inspectors and contributing to The Pupil voice which has been highlighted by The Children's Commissioner for Wales as an essential part in Children's Learning (welsh government, 2018)
To Early Years Professionals, the Child is paramount, so without reflective practice, the best interests of the child are not being upheld as well as they should.
Hallet (2013) emphasises the importance of having highly trained reflective practitioners leading the Early Years workforce on providing better outcomes for children's development Leaders become important and respected role models to the staff and children they work with and positively influence, social, economical and health related outcomes. This view is supported by UNICEF, who have found that early education is essential in narrowing the poverty margins and helping children escape poverty.

Reflection can help you to understand the people you work with.
Brodie and Savage (2015) advise early years practitioners to observe children ensuring their play in order to gather evidence of their interests I order to plan for an inclusive curriculum. Practitioners cannot assume to already know what every child wants, or is ready to do based on their own personal and cultural beliefs, but instead should observe and document before making decisions on what to plan in order to support development

Having a reflective Practice can help you realise where you need to seek further learning.
Professionals in the area of education and childcare will need to continuously keep up to date with new legislation and educational models, as well as meeting new people with a wide range of beliefs, cultural differences and ideas about education. Brock (2014) says that Reflection offers us the opportunity to identify gaps in our understanding and develop our knowledge. This could mean researching a new model of learning or taking part in a course to develop understanding in the area you feel like you need to more about.

Reflective practice is useful as a form of harm reduction/prevention.
Failure to reflect on our actions can result in dualistic Thinking, which Palaiologou (2012) defines as, thinking in terms that "Halt the dialect" in multi-agency teams, by only seeing a right and wrong way to act. If practitioners are unable to communicate, important issues could be overlooked, and our own bias thinking could cloud our judgement resulting in acting in a way that could cause harm or inhibit a child's progress.
Being able to consider other perspectives will make you a better problem solver and a more ethical practitioner who is able to work well as part of a multi-agency team.

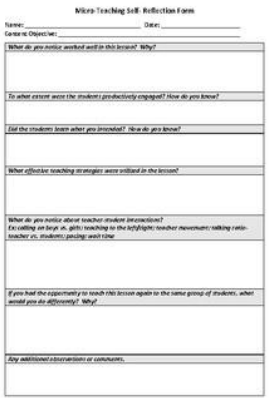
Having a Reflective practice as part of your Personal and professional development can help you to share your knowledge.
Brodie and Savage (2015) go on to say that the evidence gathered from observation can be shared with other professionals in discussions about a child's progress. For instance, different practitioners, or even the child's caregiver, may have conflicting ideas of what developmental band a child needs to be assigned, but if observations have been made, documenting the child's abilities then you can share this information and negotiate the best path of learning for the child.

Reflective Practice can ensure inclusion in the Early Years.

Working as part of a Multi-Agency Team is usually the case when children with Special Educational Needs need to be considered.
Approaches that staff use as standard may no longer be best practice and you will need to reflect regularly as you consider and enact differentiation to support the specific needs presented by the child while continuing to support the others (Hallet, 2013) Early Years Practitioners may feel challenged and in need of extra support themselves to ensure they are doing the best for the child and so reflection, alone, and as a team can help them voice their needs and develop an inclusive curriculum where no child is left behind. The child's voice, and the views of their caregiver will also need to be considered during the reflective process so a holistic view is developed.

Bringing reflective Practice to The Early Years.

An effective way to incorporate Reflective Practice into Early Years settings is to schedule time to address your peers so you get time to share insights, thoughts and feelings.
The REFLECT Framework outlined by Hallett (2013) gives us a list of discussion targets to facilitate reflection, **Reason, Evaluate, Feedback, Learn, Explain, Consider and Think**.
They could also provide a checklist for personal reflection and help organise and record qualitative data.
Reflection templates can also be used to record your self-reflection to evidence and monitor progression.


Micro-Teaching Self- Reflection Forms

Name: _____ Date: _____
Content Objective: _____

What do you notice about teacher student interaction?
Ex: calling on boys vs. girls; teaching to the left/right; teacher movement; talking ratio- teacher vs. students; pacing; wait time

Any additional observations or comments.

Teacherspayteachers.com

Models and Theories of Reflection.

There are many theories we can use to better understand the Reflective cycle, while the concept of reflection remains the same, the models of reflection and their supporting theories can differ making some approaches more suitable for different situations. When used, these models of reflective practise should allow for effective problem solving and improved practice.

Dewey

John Dewey was a Psychologist and one of the first people to theorise about reflection. Dewey considered reflection to be an active state where the reflective person is not simply recalling the event but evaluating and learning from the experience of it.
Dewey identified three key attitudes in order to be successful as a reflective practitioner, **open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness**. (Hallet, 2013)
An open-minded practitioner is able to appreciate a wider perspective of a situation that considers the viewpoints of others and enables us to gain a more balanced picture.
A responsible practitioner is accountable to the children in their care, the team and themselves, and is able to reflect honestly and make observations that will influence their decisions to benefit everyone in a meaningful way.
To reflect wholeheartedly is to consider how using reflective practice can be used to create beneficial changes on a wider scale, beyond the children and families a practitioner is working with. Reflective practice can be a step to enact changes in school provision and future practice locally or nationally over time.

Schon

Schon is credited by Hallett (2013) to be the person to introduce the notion of the reflective practitioner into teaching.

While some models of reflection focus on meditating on the event, after it has occurred, Donald Shon's 'Reflection in Action' model is characterised by reflecting on events as they unfold in order to decide the best course of action in that moment, which is sometimes known as 'Thinking on your Feet'. This type of reflective practice will require the practitioner to have existing knowledge and experiences to be able to make these decisions.

The next model of reflection developed by Schon is Reflection on Action, this part of the process occurs after the event has taken place, and although it still relies on the practitioners existing knowledge and experiences, it allows them to consider more broadly, why they made the choices they did, and the variables that led them to those choices.

Kolb

Educational theorist David Kolb identified 4 stages in the reflective cycle.

1. Experience - This stage involves learning something new or experiencing something unfamiliar. At this stage, understanding is not yet developed.
2. Reflect - At this stage, a person looks back on the experience to discover how they felt, how they acted, and what happened as a result of their actions.
3. Conceptualise– At this stage, a person develops a wider understanding and draws conclusions about their involvement They will also consider what they could do differently to influence the outcome of this situation in future.
4. Plan – This is the stage when ideas and strategies developed in the Conceptualism stage are put to the test and the cycle begins again. (Brock, 2014)

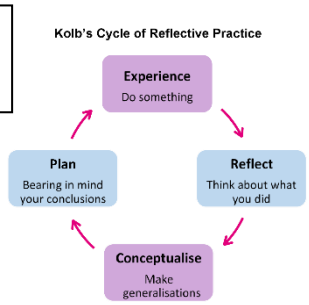
Kolb's reflective cycle is simple to use which makes it a good model for reflection when time is short, however, it has been criticised for being overly simplistic and not incorporating the thoughts and feelings of others involved in the event being reflected upon

Gibbs

One of the most recognisable models of reflection is Gibbs' Reflective Cycle which was developed by Graham Gibbs in 1988. This model is a framework of six stages that help us to analyse and learn from our experiences. The university of Edinburgh identified the stages in Gibbs' Reflective cycle as:

- **Description** -Details about the experience
- **Feelings** - How you felt while you were going through the experience
- **Evaluation** - Summarise the good and bad aspects of what you have experienced.
- **Analysis -** Use you existing knowledge to understand why things went the way they did.
- **Conclusion** - Draw together what happened, what it taught you and what you could have done differently.
- **Action plan** - Develop a strategy for how you might deal with a similar situation in the future using the lessons

Kolb's Reflective Cycle



Here we can see how fewer steps there are in Kolb's model of reflection compared to Gibbs'.

Gibbs Reflective Cycle

Conclusion

Reflection is never finished, it's a cycle that practitioners will repeat throughout their careers and has proven to be a useful tool in improving practice. Evidence of Reflective practice is well received by school inspection bodies to give an insight into how the setting is run and how problems are overcome(teachingexpertise.com), proving that we are accountable, responsible and wholehearted professionals, attributes that Dewey would deem extremely valuable, this goes to show that the theories that underpin reflective practice remain relevant and useful when we understand them.