

Reflective Practice

This briefing paper will explain what Reflective Practice is and why it can be important. Obstacles we may face, ways to overcome them and how practitioner can develop the skills to become a reflective practitioner.

What is reflective practice?

Victoria State Government in Australia (2021), states that reflective practice is a continued learning process which requires a professional practitioner to assess critically and dissect things to achieve a greater comprehension. Discussions and acknowledgement with others such as the children, families and other professionals working with the setting can again improve the progression and challenge the child's development, whilst in turn supporting your own personal and professional growth. Brock, A. (2015), suggests that to reflect is to scrutinize situations from all directions objectively. To reflect on a method is to maintain and improve where necessary. To reflect as a professional practitioner can be as important as changing a child or family's life. The skills required for positive reflection are to study, scrutinize and bring in your own personal and practical encounters, this giving more clarity. These skills will build a better perception, compassion and improve professional practice, as reflection can be researched back as far as ancient Greek philosophers.

Why is reflection important for early years practitioners?

A reflective practitioner meets the requirements of a professional practitioner. Learning and enhancing the standard of their profession and extending the learning experiences for the children with their involvement. A practitioner must blend reflective practice into their craft in order to obtain a high standard of work for both the setting and you. Brock, A. (2015). According to New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society (2019)., A reflective practitioner is vital to a child's education as they are continuing to develop their own professional development as well as challenging the child in all areas regardless of the standard tests scores. Educating a child on reflective practice is opening a door to a greater understanding and knowledge and not to accept information on face value but to question why and gain a better critical perception.

Obstacles of a reflective practitioner.

When striving to become a reflective practitioner there may be many obstacles to face, Cambridge Libraries (2021), have given some helpful tips.

Feeling like you have no time, remember, even though reflection can take time, it improves your mental health, professional development and the education of the child. This time should be factored into your planning.

Lack of support from management, it is beneficial to the setting due to teamwork, higher qualified staff and continuous development to challenges for the child.

You yourself can be the greatest obstacle. Set small targets, it will be trial and error whilst learning the skills. Find the environment that best suits you to reflect. Remember its ok to feel unmotivated sometimes, do not be hard on yourself, it's a learning process.

How to Reflect

Dr Meierdink, C. (2017) explains that the theorist Donald Schon interprets reflection in two ways, 'on action' is when we reflect after the event, using many different strategies and 'in action', when reflecting is using your tacit knowledge build up over years of experience. Dr. Klein, G. (2018) video explains that tacit knowledge is our intuition, this is formed by pattern recognition, Perceptual discrimination, Mental models and judging typicality. All of which are developed over the years of experiences in day-to-day life and work. We live every day by trusting our intuition.

Reflection on action

The Libguides (2021) at Cambridge University believes that there is not one set way to explain how to carry out reflective practice as this can depend upon one's personal experiences. Reflecting on a regular basis will help to improve your skills, you can reflect on activities that went well and activities that did not go as expected. Reflection can play a part in any experience that occurs and ways to reflect can vary for the person and the circumstance. Remember, reflecting is an ongoing exercise that can be developed over time. One way is reflective writing, this can be used in many different situations and can be very therapeutic which is supported by the description given by Grigg, (2015). There are many ways to carry out reflective practice, video recordings, this can be a very effective tool for not only reflecting on the lesson but also on the behaviour. Reflective writing, journal or diary. This can be restorative for your own well-being, can give a clearer understanding of your own thoughts, feelings and view of profession. Discussion with peers and groups will indicate their thoughts and feelings about the subject and can enhance and support the progression.

To carry out co-reflection you need good communication skills. Skillopedia (2016) suggests that you think about what you are going to say, the tone of your voice and your body language. Some words can offend, or slang words are not necessary a good choice therefore, by thinking about what you are going to say you can choose your words. Depending on the situation, the tone of voice can be adjusted accordingly, there would be no reason for a harsh tone when the conversation is friendly but professional. Sitting or standing with your arms crossed is not very professional or engaging, this along with eye contact and facial expressions will need to be considered. Remember Communication is not just about what and how you say something, it is also about your listening technique, by repeating, agreeing or even disagreeing with a viewpoint can show you are engaged in the conversation.

Why we should reflect

On the Unicef, (no date)., web page it gives us the UNCRC. Articles 12 to 14 are about the child's right to have an opinion, have a thought and have the right to express, be heard and taken into consideration. These can be adhered to when we 'reflect on action' with the children regarding to their learning challenges in school. We carry out reflection exercise after a focus task daily, this can sometimes be as simple as asking them how they think the task went and either then discussing it or just colouring in a face to give their opinion. At the end of the week, a class discussion about the whole week's challenges, gives children their voice, be heard and have their viewpoint regarded. In the discussion they talk about what they enjoyed, what they would like to know more about, what did not work and how we could change things. This information is all considered for the future planning.

Encouraging children to be part of their own learning is supported by Brodie and Savage, (2015). As the curriculum framework has developed over the years, so has the significance of learning through play. Adults in the foundation phase are taking on the role of assisting and encouraging the learning, therefore, a strong, positive relationship between the adults and the students is essential. When reflecting on activities that have been carried out, listening to the children's positive, negative feedback, ideas of what we could do differently next time and what worked are all critical to the learning for the child. Children are not identical they are moulded by their nurture, however, should we expect all to develop in the same way? A reflective practitioner can identify how individual children learn and adapt the class environment accordingly. This practice can be inclusive for all children.

According to Hacker, D., Dunlosky, J. & Graesser, A. (1998) reflection on action is one task that can help develop metacognition, this is a higher level of cognitive skill which is when we think about what we are thinking. Metacognitive knowledge is knowledge that you have learnt but do not think about, like driving a car, once you grasped the concept you do not need to repeat the process.

To include children and adults in your reflection activities can improve knowledge, understanding and experiences for all involved. It can make for happier staff and can be more inclusive for the children's learning abilities. Candy, L. (2019) supports this by suggesting that an independent creative practitioner would have worked for years on their skills to become a Creative reflective practitioner, however, when working as part of a team the practitioner then needs to adopt a new skill on sharing, amalgamating ideas on reflection. This teaches the individual and the team a new skill set of knowledge and understanding therefore, building on their professional development. Reflection is just as imperative to our development as it is to co-innovation.

Jasper, M. (2003) suggests that Kolb's reflective cycle is the base for learning through experience, this cycle gives a simplistic overview of how to reflect, learn and implement change. A continued process will develop the knowledge and understanding of professional development.

Concrete Experience - Give an account of what happened in detail.

Reflective Observation - What was positive, negative and why.

Abstract Conceptualization - What can we learn, change or replicate.

Active Experimentation - Trial the plan of action for a similar situation.

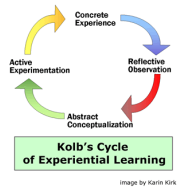


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Summary

A reflective practitioner is continually learning, improving and developing their skills as a professional practitioner. This also enables the children to have a vast range of experiences, be part of their own learning, help to develop problem solving, critical thinking and coping skills. It can enhance the classroom ethos and improve communication skills and relationships between the adults and children. This is supported by Leon-Henri, D.D.P. (2021) journal entry. We are progressing towards reflective practitioners in my setting, there is always room for improvement. We are very good verbally reflecting after a focus task however, taking the information researched in this module back to the setting and discussing with line managers and colleagues is something very beneficial to all. There are reflective tasks that we do very well and there are tasks that need improving. Included in this paper are some examples of ways to carry out reflection. It can vary, depending on the person, circumstance and setting, therefore, this will be a discussion we will start with.

The University of Edinburgh, (2021)., have a variety of different structured models of reflective framework that can be used or modified to suit. The reflective process can be different for each individual and situation. A well-known model is Gibb's cycle. The diagram shows the six different steps to go through.

Step 1 Description - answer what, when and who questions to give a full account. When reflecting with others they may have a different recollection. Both significant.

Step 2 Feeling - Take into consideration the feelings of everybody before, during and after.

Step 3 Evaluation - Discuss what was positive, negative, what worked and what did not work.

Step 4 Analysis - Why the situation was worked or did not work, why things were good or not good.

Step 5 Conclusion - What knowledge was absorbed; how could we improve and what could we do differently.

Step 6 Action Plan - What to do in a similar situation next time, how to ensure its actioned moving forward.

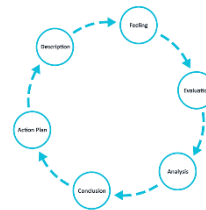


Image from the University of Edinburgh.

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