The importance of reflective practice as a professional practitioner ECEY4002/C

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Overview

This briefing paper is a document explaining/ outlining the importance of reflective practice as a professional practitioner within the early years. It will explore and define what reflection and reflective practice is, how to apply it, how early years benefit from it, how can introduce reflection to an early year setting, theoretical frameworks, and models of reflection, how it improves the quality of practice and how it can support you develop.

What is reflection and reflective practice?

As a professional in early years, it is important that practitioners provide the best supervision attainable for the children within their setting. Reflective practice is a particularly effective way to nurture and frequently enhance the characteristics of the practice. This will support children to enable self-awareness, understand others, their personal development and building confidence. Professional association for childcare and early years (PACEY, 2016). Reflection is not something that is a new venture for all practitioners in fact Brock is able to discover that it can be traced back to the Greek philosophers – Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Brock, 2015, p.7). These philosophers' discussion was established on deliberation and reflection. Reflection and reflective practice are principles of professionals and have a critical role in professional tuition (Brock, 2015, p.7). The intention of reflective practice is to produce greater standards of experiences for children and their families. There are two main key qualities within early years. There is structure quality which relates to inputs which are easily observed such as group sizes, teacher-child ratios, staff retention and personal development. Secondly process quality is capturing children's day-to-day experiences that includes the educational activities undertaken, the types of interaction between children, parents and teachers and the way in which routine care needs are met (Early intervention foundation, 2018). When practitioners play a part in reflection, they can enhance provision and practice by producing informed knowledgeable decisions about whether their work with children and young people is worthwhile or not (Hallet, 2013, p25). The university of Cambridge (2021) states that reflection can become a very individual thing and that everyone will characterize it in non-identical ways. It is also key to remember that there is no correct or incorrect way of defining what reflection is to you or how it should be done. This is something that is personal due to each and everyone's own personal situations, values, understanding and perception. According to Thornton and Brunton (2007) they believe that effective practice within early years needs to entail commitment, enthusiasm, and reflective practitioners with a span of knowledge, ability and understanding.

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How early years benefit from it and how can we introduce reflection to an early year setting?

As a professional practitioner within early years, it is important they go the extra mile, rather than just doing what they are told to do. This will then help to expand their skills and understanding. We can introduce reflection into the early years setting by keeping a daily diary on any thoughts and feeling that might occur during the day, have group staff meetings or reflective account forms, within these things from a description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusions, and an action plan can be discussed. This can become a long-winded task but after time reflection will become a natural attribute within the practice and therefore become beneficial to all within the setting (Early years careers, 2015). Reflective practice allows us as practitioners to provide a more child centred approach, benefiting children because it will always put the child at the centre of the learning process and then meet the needs of each individual child. In addition to that it concentrates on looking at things from a child's perspective, gives them an opportunity to learn through experiences, learn by doing, listening to children will teach them that their ideas are valued, have a sense of belonging, the individual child is able to make decisions and solve problems, can develop in a confident and Independent way with respect and being comfortable in who they are, it will develop a child's understanding of themselves and the surrounding world and the child's holistic development is addressed (City & Guilds, 2022). Lastly, as well as reflecting alone, it is important to reflect with colleagues that are trustable and will add depth to your professional and personal reflection. It is also vital to develop good relationships with the child and their families, this way one can build a good communication base with parents or guardians to discuss the reflective process of a child. This way you can become one team and work together on a plan that is in the best interest of the child and their development (Paige-Smith and Craft 2011).

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Theoretical frameworks and models of reflection

There are several model theories that can be used as a guide to support and help to reflect. Despite the fact all the models are different, they can include very alike stages throughout, some of the models have more than others. Gibbs reflective cycle is one of the most well-known models that practitioners use. Despite this, there is no right model. It is key to choose the one that feels most comfortable and assists best. Gibbs reflective cycle was created in 1988 by Graham Gibbs and this is made up of six different steps to guide you through reflection. These six steps are: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. By using these steps in depth as a professional practitioner it will be a guide for them to critically evaluate what is good or bad about it, plan and learn from the outcomes. Secondly there is also another reflective model that is practical within professional practise, this is the Driscoll's what model. Driscoll's model is based on three what

is on questions. By answering these three questions its then you start to analyse the experiences and learn from them. This is one of the simplest models of reflection. Firstly, Driscoll states that it is important to briefly describe the situation/ experience they are reflecting on to make sure everyone is aware of exactly what has happened. Secondly how it was in the moment, what reactions occurred and how it was during that situation. Thirdly, what has the professional learnt from that experience and if anything could have been prevented. Furthermore, he states that reflection is intended to be something that needs time and dedication. Thirdly Schon defines in his early work that professionals become observant of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experiences. His theory is that there are 2 types of reflection, reflection in action which is reflecting when you are doing that action and reflection on action which is after the action has happened. Within Schon's theory he believes that reflecting when the experience is occurring or reflecting once it has occurred. He states that thinking in action is considering the situation, deciding how to act and to act immediately. Secondly reflection on action he states that reconsidering the situation, thinking about what needs to be done and changing for the future (Open library, 2021). Finally, according to McLeod, Kolb published his learning technique in 1984. Kolb's theory operates on two levels, a series of a four-stage cycle which are: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. It identifies that to have the learning experience we ideally need to go through a few set stages beginning with describing a concrete experience. It is important that when we see something as an experiment, for example: accepting that things may or may not work out, we are more open to the learning experience. Kolb believed that we cannot perform both variables on a single axis at the same time for example: think and feel. It is a style of product of those two decisions (McLeod (2017). Within using reflective practice models there can be both pros and cons to it. The university of Cambridge points out that some pros can be when you use the reflective models, they can be a structure to follow, this in turn can be a helpful guide to the practitioner, as well as providing a starting point for someone who is unaware where to begin. The cons can be that in day to day practice the models may not always apply, practitioners may need to adapt to deal with the situation at hand. Reflection is a continuous process, and all professional practitioners might be able to carry out the situation without the need to perform each stage again.

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How it improves the quality of practice and how it can support you develop?

Reflection can improve the quality of practice within the settings for the better as when we continue to reflect, we are then able to develop our professional knowledge and skills further. Us as professional practitioners, we have the responsibility to ensure the utmost for all children within our care. The quality of practice will be improved as us as practitioners will be able to creatively develop the imposed framework for learning and teaching. We can all learn from each other within the settings as we can learn from others whilst acknowledging our own experiences as well as having discussions with colleagues to share knowledge, experiences, and expertise. We can also shed light on unfamiliar behaviours or unintended outcomes (Colwell 2019). After some time, reflective practice will become a natural pattern within our practise. As a professional practitioner as well as reflecting to improve reflection, it can also be used to ensure that all the children are gaining from the curriculum. Aswell as this, it is an insight into our professional practice to think analytically about any element of it (Health and care profession council, 2021). Reflection can support professional practitioners develop by overcoming barriers, innovation, problem solving and self-awareness (Teach Kloud, 2019). The Reggio approach states that to improve the quality of practice and support you develop as a professional, it requires one to be committed, enthusiastic, and reflective practitioners with a breadth of knowledge, skills and understanding. Reflection can support one to evolve as a professional by having a better understanding of others, develop critical thinking skills, and encourages active engagement (skills you need, 2017). When the reflective approach is applied within the setting a professional practitioner can see their strengths and development needs if needed. Early years foundation stage statutory framework (EYFS) is the standard that all early year's practitioners must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well, that all children have the knowledge and skills to start school and are kept safe and healthy. This framework is for all school staff and can relate to all maintained schools, non-maintained schools, nurseries, childminding, and private nursery groups. Early years foundation stage seeks to provide quality and consistency, a secure foundation, partnership working and equal opportunities (gov.uk, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion to the above briefing, it is important to remember that reflection is about learning through our experiences and towards gaining new insights. Reflection is an essential capability for all professional practitioners to have within a childcare setting. When we carry out reflection daily, we are ensuring that we are doing the utmost learning and care is provided to all. It also cannot be denied that the theories and models discussed during this briefing paper can be methods one should be able to begin their reflecting journey with.