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Reflective Practice Briefing Paper

According to Brock (2015), reflection has been used for a long time as it can be traced back to the Greek Philosophers such as Socrates. The philosophical debate was founded on reflection and critical thinking/thoughts. Reflection has been found in very high demand within many professional roles. It is mainly used within professional roles for training, higher and further education and portfolios where assessments occur through reflective practice in which an evaluation of practice is expected. Brock also states that reflection and reflective practice are key values of a professional and that they play a big part in professional training. Forde *et al,* (2006) states that early childhood educators need to be able to articulate their pedagogical aims as well as their educational aims but also to include their personal values which can then reflect on their future actions and responses so that the curriculum is delivered appropriately. For reflective practice to be purposeful, it needs to be meaningful and for early years practitioners it also must relate to their work with young children and their families. Ryan, (2011) also observes that reflection needs to be taught in a systematic way as it can tend to be superficial. By doing it in a systematic way, reflective practice can be moved from the everyday and immediate situation. Hickson (2011) has a definition of reflection: to reflect thinking in order to analyse experiences and practice in a mirror image sort of way. Hickson does observe that there is no clear definition as then it can be perceived from different theoretical perspectives.

The purpose of reflective practice according to Brock (2015), is that it is an everyday practice which helps you to improve personal work with children and is a way to ensure that quality provision is provided. It is also important to use reflective practice as it enables you to become a professional practitioner through training by providing portfolios with examples of an evaluation of a reflection that has been used within practice. By using reflective practice, we are critically evaluating our skills and knowledge but also enhancing our communication through peer reflection. We learn to understand others' needs and the aspect of team working is also developed by using reflective practice. By being a reflective practitioner, we continually develop mindful and critical awareness of ourselves and others around us. Reflective practice has many benefits to children one of which being that it continually improves the provision of care that the children receive.

Theoretical frameworks and models

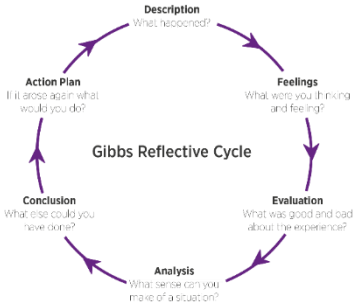
A model of reflection is a process that is structured, and it is used as a guide for personal and situational analysis according to Kate Bush (no date). Using a model of reflection has many benefits to individuals such as helping them to understand their own thinking but also their own learning strategies. Reflective models also allow individuals to put their previous understanding into relation with their own knowledge. A model of reflection works in a way that the process of reflective thinking involves always thinking about analysing what has been done, what is being done and what has been learned. Models of reflection help guide individuals through the process, but each model varies in the way of approaching the considerations.

The CARL model of reflection

A framework for professional analysis and improvement is the CARL model of reflection or the CARL technique. This model focuses on C- the context of past experiences, A- the actions that were taken, R- the results that occurred and L- the lessons that were learned. Within this framework, it is a requirement to provide descriptions for each element, but it does not require further planned action, unlike some models of reflection. Instead of doing planned actions, it focuses on the belief that the practice of identifying new lessons will affect processes on its own.

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

This form of reflective cycle was developed in 1988 by Graham Gibbs in order to help structure learning from past experiences. It offers a way for practitioners to learn and plan from things that either went well or things that did not work out. There are 6 stages within the cycle. The six stages are description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, action plan. The model of Gibbs' reflective cycle is a good way to work through an experience. This can be a good way to work through such as a stand-alone situation such as a meeting with your team. Although the stages apply for single experiences, they also can be used for repeated situations. For each stage there are certain questions that can help provide a structure for the reflection. Within the description there are questions such as what happened and who was present? Within the feelings stage are questions like what were you feeling before and after the situation? The evaluation stage includes questions like what went well and then what did not go so well? A question that is included in the evaluation stage is why things went well and why did it not go well? Within the conclusion stage there are questions such as what did I learn from this situation and what else could I have done to get a better outcome? The action plan stage includes a question of how will I develop the required skills I need?



This reflective cycle can be applied to professional practice as it is a way of continuous professional development. It also allows a professional to mindful/critical awareness and improves communication which can improve teamworking and develop skills and knowledge. According to Dunhill (2009) good communication is vital when working with children and their families. It is an important part of the Common Core. Good communication involves listening, questioning, understanding and responding to what is being said by the children and their families. Reflective practice can be used inclusively within practice according to Brodie and Savage (2015) by people listening effectively and by observing and assessing situations/tasks.

Schön reflective model

According to Donald Schön (1983), reflection is the ability of professionals to think what they are doing it whilst doing it. This reflective model includes the concept of reflection in action and reflection on action. This means that you should reflect whilst doing the task, but you should also reflect after doing the task. Reflection in action happens when there is a problem happening and it can still benefit learning if addressed. This is an efficient form of reflection as it allows an individual to react and change something at the time if needed. This form of reflection also allows you to include your own knowledge and then apply it to new experiences. Reflection on action is completed after the event/task. This involves reflecting on how practice can be changed/improved. It is important to reflect on our practice as it allows us to discover how it would have impacted differently without knowing-in action and would it have had an outcome we were not expecting. Schön also mentions the ladder of reflection which means he talks about the vertical dimension of analysis that can happen between a teacher and learner through their dialogue. In order to move up the ladder then a reflection of an activity must take place, but to move down the ladder an experimentation must be done and not reflection. Schön states that by following model of reflection, there will be a questioning approach in place. There will be things to consider such as why things are as they are and how they could be. The strengths and areas of your own development can be reflected upon and could be a way to find out how to develop them further. Therefore, this means that what is planned in future is planned carefully, with logical reasoning and that it is informed by previous experiences.

How can we introduce reflection into early years settings?

During early years settings, we must reflect in order to focus on what is working, change what is not working and to help us grow as practitioners which will then help improve the learning experiences the children receive. Reflection is all about taking a step back and thinking about what has been done and what did the children enjoy and what did they not enjoy and how could this be changed so that all children enjoy the activity. It also helps us to gain an image who has benefited from the activity whether it was children or staff or even the children's families. Although it is important to find ways to adapt certain things, it is equally important to celebrate the things that went well according to Teach Early Years (2000). There will be areas that you will feel that can be improved but this may not always be easy to find a resolution for. This area can be helped by thinking of active reflection. An example of this is being mindful about things like how you are feeling. Sharing with colleagues in another way to include reflection practice within early years even if the reflection is individual, your colleagues may be able to help come up with new ideas. Reflection does not always have to be a written account; it can include things like videos and voiceovers to support the written account. It is easier to share and is more accessible to busy staff if it is a visual or audio form of communication. Technology also allows people to connect, so if a member of staff is not present then they can be involved in a Teams meeting or Zoom. A simple option for including reflection within the sector would be to have a weekly or monthly reflective questionnaire which is shared with children, staff and their families. This enables everyone to feel that their views are being valued and that their thoughts/ideas can help to improve the learning of their children. (Dr. Helen Edwards, no date).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, reflection practice is something we do daily although we may not realise it. We are very vigilant as we are always observing children whilst working within early years. Children will only learn from modelling behaviour so it's important for us to improve our learning/behaviour for them to learn from us. Although different settings may reflect differently on their work, we all do it daily. Some settings may have quick observation sheets for a child whereas some may have books that set out targets for the children to complete that week and if not achieved then adjustment is made to the planning for it to be achieved next week. It is important for us to use reflective practice within our work so that we can improve as practitioners but also so that the children have a better experience of learning. Sometimes by involving parents and children within the reflection it can improve relationships with parents and the children and they become to feel like a part of the setting as they feel their views are being valued and listened to like in Article 12 of the UNCRC. Reflective practice is important also as it allows us to identify any weaknesses within the group and if we need to do more of a certain activity to get the children to improve on an area for example cutting skills or pencil control.