

Reflective Practice.

According to (Brock 2015) reflection can be traced back to Greek philosophy and is considered a process of analysing, taking an issue, problem or situation and delving into it exploring what has happened looking at it from different perspectives, and a variety of forms and viewpoints. The more the situation is complex the deeper analysis is required, where thinking deeply and into the heart of the situation takes place and working out what feels right. With reflection comes emotions and intuition two important roles in the process of reflection. As a professional practitioner within the early years sector using reflective practice is important as it enables further understanding and empathy which can make a difference to the children and families accessing the setting. Reflection on practice generates thinking and leads to improving practice.

Hallet (2013) suggests that reflective practice serves the purpose of improving the provision and practice allowing informed decisions to be made about work with children is an effective practice. A professional practitioner will use reflective practice to identify what works well and what doesn't then modify and improve the provision provided for the children and their families.

Paige-Smith (2011) suggest that early years settings practitioners work alongside others giving good opportunities to share perspectives on situations and compare how each individual has interpreted them. Together with care professionals, health, education or welfare professionals reflective thinking can enable new insights to be brought into the practice to optimise the outcomes for young people and their families and develop new understanding of what has happened and how to move forward. Everyone within in the early years setting should adopt the motion of reflective practice to allow them to reflect upon their day and learn from it.

Hallet (2013) agrees that reflective practice within the early years workforce is beneficial and that it should be done as an individual practice but also as a collection reflective practice. This can be done at the end of the day, or during staff and team meetings, or more casually within the staff room allowing staff to make sense of work. Considering this is a useful skill to have when working in early years education it is important to understand reflective practice may not come naturally and some practitioners may find it hard to know where to start.

Reflection is a concept considered by a number of theorists, one of which is John Dewey. According to Rogers, C. (2002) reflection is a complex process of thought which if not well studied can be used ineffectively. To enable reflection to be a rich process it needs to be understood fully. The theory of reflection created by John Dewey was built around how we think, identifying thought would include belief, imagination and reflection. Reflection is stated to be a process that moves an individual from one experience to the next whilst developing a deeper understanding of its connection with other ideas and experiences. Reflection is systematic and requires a disciplined approach to thinking to ensure continuous learning. When an individual fully understands reflection their attitude to growth and development improve valuing their own intellectual growth and that of others.

Another theorist Schön (2016) considers reflective practice as an action where occurrences are carefully and persistently considered with justifications of what has happened is developed. Reflection has been identified by Schön (2016) as two processes of reflection, reflection on action and reflection in action. Reflection in action is the process of thinking on your feet, where reflection of the situation takes place in the moment and the next steps are governed by that instant reflection. Reflection on action is a process of retrospective thinking where the thinking is done after the event has occurred. This aspect of reflection creates thinking of what will be done next, what went well, what didn't go well? What feelings were present to result in the actions taken? And what would be done next time?

Paige-Smith (2011) agrees with this reflective practice and that it should allow practitioners to see through eyes of others and not just their own. Practitioners use reflection when a situation has occurred that is unique and where the knowledge and techniques known aren't able to be applied or when something hasn't had the expected outcome or went wrong. Reflective practice is deeper than seeing and thinking about the practice delivered, it is about exploring feelings about the practice and how it is understood. When what is done is questioned and thought on how it can be developed takes place bridges are built between professional and personal experiences. Reflective practice helps incorporate the technical knowledge of the professional with the emotional qualities of the practitioner. Natural instincts interact with the professional approach practitioners are instilled with leading to actions being more powerful as they are a combination of feelings and thoughts. Reflection is not only useful when situations have arisen that are unexpected or unique but also key to everyday practice within the early years setting.

To guide professionals with developing good reflective practice there are models that can be used. There are many types of reflective models but there are three in particular that can be useful as discussed by Cambridge University Libraries (2021). According to (Jasper 2013) the ERA cycle is a simple cycle. It has three stages of reflection which are: experience, reflection and action. The cycle depicts that reflective practice starts with an experience which could be an experience previously been through or a new experience. This may be a positive or negative experience which once it has happened reflection begins, during this there are thoughts being formed as to what happened and the feelings that had arisen during so. This then leads on to the final part of the cycle, which is action, this is a what is done as a result of the experience, individually the action will differ with each person but will result in another experience forming, the cycle then continues on.

There is then the Driscoll's What Model of reflection, this cycle was developed by Driscoll in the 1990's and is based on three questions What? So What? Now What? These questions allow individuals to analyse and learn from experiences. Describing the experience sets the context of what is being reflecting upon giving clear guidance on what is being dealt with. Reflecting this experience by asking so what was learnt from experiencing the situation, then finally what will happen in the future will this experience once reflected upon result in an action or change being made, could behaviour differ, or a try a new approach, or will it be appropriate to carry on the same. Sometimes no change is made when reflection occurs, and feelings are that everything was done correctly. This outcome is a valid outcome and change doesn't always have to happen as a result of reflection.

Source (Tu Dublin Library Services)



Finally, the reflection cycle of Gibb's, this cycle is a more in-depth cycle compared to the other two and it is a more complex model of reflection. The multiple stages that guide you through the reflection process can make reflection a more attainable process as there is more detail to aid this skill. There are six stages within the cycle: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. Similarly, to the other models Gibb's starts with experience that is being reflected on discussing this in a descriptive way to aid with analysing the situation. Moving on to focusing about the feelings that were experienced during and after. Taking to then evaluation, was it a good or bad experience from the practitioner's point of view. Using this evaluation to analyse what happened and attempt to make sense of it. From this evaluation a conclusion is formed about actions that may differ to provide a different outcome. The last stage is creating an action plan of steps to take in the future should a similar situation arise. These models can support practitioners within the early years to provide experiences that support and enable children to develop. Practitioners can use reflection to plan what experiences children will have next, or to support a child who is struggling with a skill, they can reflect on what worked well for that child and what didn't and how they can maximise the experience for that child with the aim to developing their skills further.

Practitioners are already reflective in everyday life, learning through experiences and reflect on what happened, how reactions occurred and the feelings that insighted that reaction and what will happen next time, will the reaction be different? To become a professional practitioner using a model of reflection will enable understanding to be developed further. Understanding the theory behind why reflection is important, then applying this to every day practice will enhance the quality of the provision provided. Using reflective practice with others amongst the workforce will ensure a consistent approach to reflection and will deepen the understanding of situations and how best to respond to them in future practice. Learning from experiences through reflection is key for professional development and will further the knowledge and understanding within the early years sector. To further professional development reflective writing should be considered as a next step to reflective thinking and acting. Brock (2015) suggests exploring a range of reflective writing activities will deepen the reflective thinking process. Such practices could be compiling a career development plan profile, sharing short writing exercises with other critical workers, and creating digital documents to log personal and professional successes. The sharing of reflective literature will allow you to gain the perspective of others deepening reflective thinking allowing for engagement and building on each other's ideas.

Reflection can be introduced into the early years setting in several ways, encouraging workforce to reflect daily on situations throughout the day as an individual, then bringing these reflections to a group reflection. This could be done weekly to reflect on how things are progressing and to discuss what may not be going so well. If there are activities that need improving workshops for professional improvement could be scheduled to ensure the best outcome and learning experience. As part of a career development plan practitioners could use a reflective account form to document any professional learning activities undertaken, what was learnt from them, how it changed or improved the practice of the individual.

Reflective practice is a skill that comes naturally to most but can be developed to have maximum impact of professional practice. Reflective practice will enable skills and knowledge to be critically evaluated and for practitioners to make decisions allowing for further development and improving the learning of the individual and those around them with a greater understanding of the needs of others. Continuous professional development reflects a quality provision with improving standards of learning as a priority in the setting.

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