The Importance of reflective practice as a professional practitioner

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What is Reflection?

Reflection can be a process where you are analyzing and taking a deeper look into issues or problems that have arisen. It is a way in which you can examine different perspectives from a range of forms and viewpoints, which will bring about different thinking and in turn will improve practice. (Brock 2015). Reflection and reflective practice are becoming a key skill for many professional fields in particular training, further and higher education where staff are expected to reflect on their practice. (Brock 2015)

Paige-Smith and Craft (2007) believe that reflective practice is a fundamental aspect of working with young children. As Early Years Practitioners we are expected to reflect on our practices in a variety of ways which will enhance our professional development and enable us to observe how the children play in our environment. Through reflection we can encourage children's learning and development and our own professional development too.

A reflective practitioner will need to be able to think about and analyse practices that they carry out. They should be able to challenge what they do, test other ways of working and adapt practices accordingly so that they can enhance provision for the children in their care. This should then provide quality provision for the children. Practitioners can also use reflective practice on their own personal development as it enables you to assess how you work, you can note your strengths and weaknesses, so that you can plan a way forward with your continuous professional development. Pacey (2016)

Why is Reflective Practice important within the Early Years

Reflective practice will benefit everyone who accesses the provision as well as the staff team who work there. The children will benefit as through reflection of their play you will be able to meet their individual needs by adapting activities accordingly, which will increase their self-esteem, and by reflecting on the environment you will be able to enhance the provision for them to create an environment full of opportunities. Parents will also be able to see changes in quality as they will be able to see the levels of provision that you are providing on a daily basis for their children and hopefully, they will be able to see how happy their children are in the environment. Lastly, practitioners will benefit from reflective practice as they will be able to develop skills which will help with confidence and motivation. They will be able to recognise the need for additional training and be able to ask for support when needed. All of this reflective practice will result in good inspection reports and happy, content children, parents and staff. Pacey (2016)

Theories of Reflective Practice

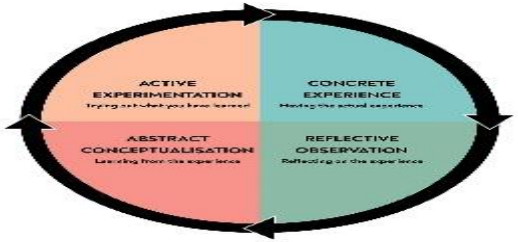
John Dewey -Dewey's main interest in reflective thinking was problem-solving. He recognised that people only started to reflect when there was a problem or an issue that cannot be resolved. Dewey believes that reflection is a further dimension of peoples thought processes and that people need to expand on this to be an effective practitioner. Dewey believes that looking back at what has happened is important as you begin to understand why it happened. Dewey observed "we do not learn from experience we learn from reflection on experience". (1933:78) Dewey's research is still used in present day and he argued that if you are not a reflective practitioner, then you could be in danger of discrimination or outdated thinking. If practitioners are critically reflective on their practice using the skills, they have learnt such as observation and reasoning their work should be responsible and ethical. (Roffey-Barentson 2013)

Donald Schon - Donald Schon believes that for a practitioner to engage in continuous learning reflection is key. He believes this to be an imperative characteristic for a professional practitioner. His approach to reflection is referred to as reflective practice. Schon specified two elements of reflection, they are reflection in action and reflection on action. Reflection in action is a process where a practitioner will need to reflect in the moment, they will need to consider the situation, decide how to act and then act immediately, whereas reflection on action is a process where a practitioner will reflect after something has happened, they will reconsider the situation and think about what happened after. (Roffey-Barentson 2013)

Models of Reflective Practice

David Kolb

Kolb introduced a four-stage model of learning called the experiential cycle. This cycle involves practitioners carrying out the task, reflecting on it, reading up on information if it did not go well and then planning the next steps. However, this type of cycle can be used at any point for example, you may plan an activity, carry it out and after reflection realise you need more information or resources so would change it in the future or it could start with you researching first as you have limited knowledge on the subject, then implementing the task, reflecting on it and then introducing next steps. (Brock 2015)

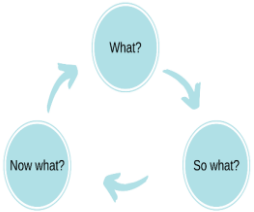


Source: Simply Psychology (2017) Google Search

Models of Reflective Practice

John Driscoll

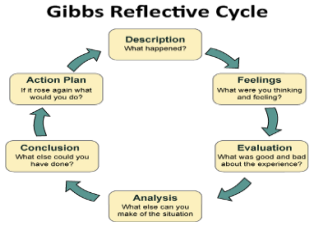
Driscoll's model is based on the 3 what's, what? So what? and now what? He believes that if you consider what the situation was, this enables you to have a clear view of what you will need to reflect on, then you ask so what? and ask yourself what was learnt from that experience? Lastly now what? what will we do with the knowledge we have gained from reflection.



Source: University of Cambridge (no date)

Graham Gibbs

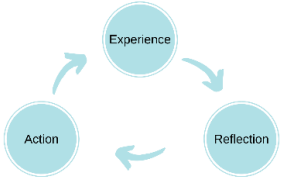
Gibbs offered another model of reflection which has six stages. This enables you to follow the path of describing, feeling, evaluating, analysing, concluding and making an action plan. This can be seen by some practitioners as restricting as you are only able to consider the points offered, but others consider this model as the most useful as you question each element of your activity. (Brock 2015)



Source: Crowe Associates (no date) Google Search

Melanie Jasper

Jasper (2013) developed the ERA cycle which has 3 stages, experience, reflection, and action. The cycle starts with the experience whether it is new or been used before, you then reflect on the experience examining your feelings and decide on what to do next. The final stage is taking action, the action will result in another experience and the cycle will continue.



Source: University of Cambridge (no date)

Pros and Cons of Reflective Models

Reflective models can be a good way for practitioners to start the reflection process, however, all models discussed do have downsides. One of the cons to the models are they are a useful starting point for staff who are unsure where to start and one of the cons is that models not apply to all situations that arise in your provision. It is up to you as a professional to see what works best for you.

How reflective practice can improve quality in the Early Years

All Early Years provisions are inspected by a regulated body whether it is CIW or ESTYN and during this process providers are expected to evaluate their service. This is a form of reflection and will help to identify areas for improvement, which in turn will raise the quality of the provision. During the inspection process parents and practitioners are also asked to evaluate the service and for parents they are asked things such as how they felt the settling in process was, how they feel their child's needs are being met and how management deal with any issues that arise and the staff team are asked similar questions on how the induction process was, do they feel supported and do they feel they can speak to management if they had any concerns. All of this feedback is crucial so that it enables the provider to improve on their service.

Practitioners are also expected to reflect on the activities that they provide for the children on a daily basis, this again will improve quality as in carrying out the reflection you will be able to see how the children play in the activities and whether it meets the outcome that was intended., if not how can you adapt it so that it does.

Reflection through watching the children play will also permit you to see if the children feel safe and secure in their environment as some children may not be accessing the provision as much and may prefer quieter times, so you can adapt your activities accordingly so that you are meeting every child's individual needs. Brock (2015)

How reflective practice can develop you as a practitioner

Tarrant (2013) believes that reflection is an important part of professionalism and when practitioners reflect on practice, we are able to be more appreciative, disciplined and able to recognise our strengths and weaknesses. Tarrant (2013) says that as a professional you need to acknowledge that our actions and attitudes are influenced by our own values and stresses the importance of acknowledging that these values without realising could be affecting the way in which we see or do things, so by ensuring we reflect on practices will enable to recognise this and act accordingly.

Hallet (2013) says that reflecting on your own practices can be disheartening on occasions as you realise that the work you carried out wasn't to the standards it should be, so not everyone wants to reflect on their practices. After reflection you may also need to change the way in which you carry out tasks which can also be challenging to deal with, so it is important that you strike the balance between being reflective or overly negative about the way in which you work too.

Brock (2015) states that discussions with colleagues or a friend who can be critical will allow you to see different views on you practices or opinions, which will support your professional development too.

Conclusion

There are a number of strategies discussed in this paper which should enable a practitioner to begin on their journey of reflection. Reflection is now a key part of practice in the Early Years and will help ensure that the children in your care are getting the best experience as you will be catering for their individual needs. Reflection will also be able to develop you as a practitioner as you will be reflecting on your practices and seeing what you can do well, what you need support with and it can also highlight training that you may need, which is good for professional development.

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