

Reflection and Reflective Practice

Moon (2013) states the term reflection typically suggests various interpretations. Firstly that reflection is set between the learning process and the representation of learning. Individuals may reflect on something in consideration of re-representing it in another form, such as orally or written. Second, reflections should be seen with a purpose in order for it to be useful for future practice, individuals occasionally come to conclusions, sometimes regarding difficult issues without acknowledging it was a reflective process. This could indicate that subconsciously occurring reflection has combined with intuition, and is processing that generates a useful result that can be considered.

According to Thompson (2021), reflection is a natural part of life, but can also be achieved intentionally. As the process entails an examination of ideas and actions as well as the ability to analyse events, there are numerous reasons to reflect. Practitioners may consider professional values and build new understandings and ways of practice through reflecting. It can also support in gaining a deeper understanding into the impression that is presented to others.

Moreover, HCPC (2021) define reflective practice as a method of gaining insight into one’s professional experience by critically thinking about every aspect of it. Everyone learns in different ways, whilst one individual may benefit from reflecting on a good outcome, others may benefit from reflecting on a scenario they found difficult. They state in order to get the greatest result from reflecting, it is critical to do so in the method that best suits the individual.

Reflection and Professional Practice

PACEY (2016) describe by reflecting on practice on a regular basis will help support individuals improve their skills whilst also increasing confidence and motivation. It also assists in professional identity and setting goals. This will lead to improvements within the setting and allows professionals to clearly evidence outcomes.

Good communication is key in professional practice (Dunhill, Elliott, and Shaw, 2009. Professionals must have communication skills such as listening, questioning, and paraphrasing, as well as a comprehension and recognition of, and use of body language, in order to build a trusting relationship with children, young people, parents, and caregivers. It is beneficial to try to grasp and reflect on the individual's emotions in addition to knowing and reflecting the individual's verbal messages.

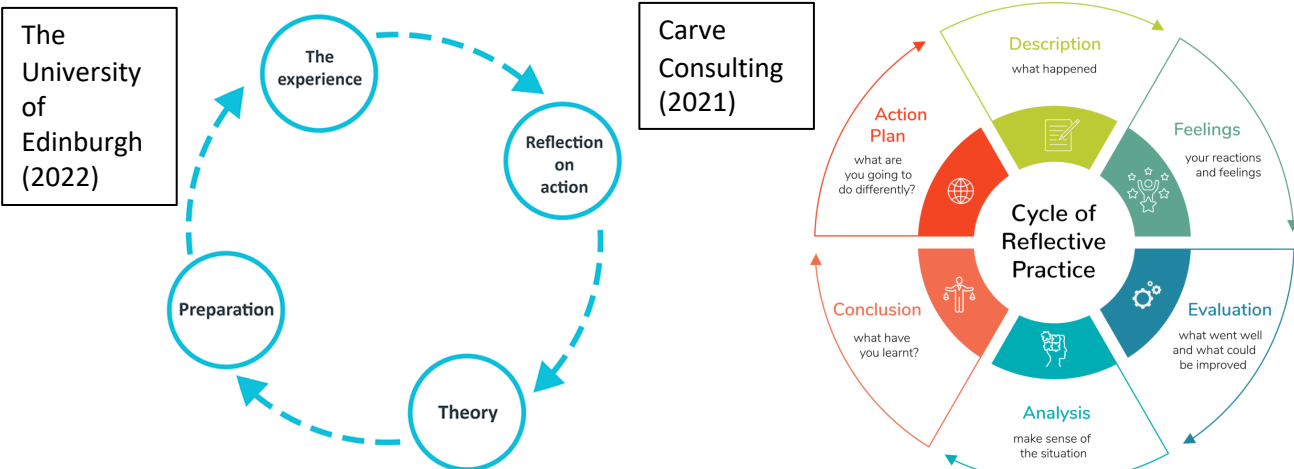
Listening effectively and developing positive relationships are part of inclusive practice. Inclusion considers that all individuals are different and have different needs. regardless of differences, individuals should have equal access to opportunities and resources, as well as being valued and respected (Brodie and Savage, 2015).

Reflection within Early Years Workforce

Brock (2014) states reflection must be relevant in order to be useful, and it must relate to the work of early childhood educators with young children and their families. New knowledge, thinking, policy, and practice emerge on a regular basis, within the environment of where and with whom practitioners work, through accepting or adapting to change. New changes may feel beneficial or negative to the practitioner, yet regardless of immediate and personal/professional reactions, detailed review on any change is required. The ability to reflect on the impact of change on the children and families involved, as well as the implications on working practice, is considered as a professional attribute.

Moreover, Hallet (2012) further explains that being reflective and being a reflective practitioner are more about features and attributes in a person's behaviour than a cognitive activity, a process of seeing and being that is part of how an early childhood practitioner works, thinks, and acts professionally. Reflective behaviour refers to the characteristics and qualities displayed by practitioners in their relationships with children, parents, and co-workers. These qualities enable practitioners to problem solve, reason, and improve the practice of their setting. These reflecting attributes and qualities are illustrated in the REFLECT (Reason, Evaluate, Feedback, Learn, Explain, Consider, Think) Framework.

Furthermore, PACEY (2016) suggests that to be a reflective practitioner, individuals must be able to take a balanced view of their work, recognising and celebrating their strengths and what works well while also acknowledging what may be amended. Evaluating practise will assist practitioners in identifying their professional development requirements and will help them gain confidence in their practice over time. Additionally, a reflective practitioner will take time to gather thought on their actions and how this affects children and families under their care, as well as how this can improve the quality of their practice.



Models of reflection

There are many different models of reflection that aid in reflection, some with common themes, or differences in the number of steps included in the models.

One of the common models that practitioners use is The Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988). Gibb's reflective cycle is divided into six stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. The University of Hertfordshire Library (2021) explain Gibb's model begins with a summary of the event being considered. It then urges the user to concentrate on their emotions during and after the encounter. The next stage is to assess the experience and determine what was positive and what was negative from their perspective. They can then utilise this assessment to analyse and make sense of the scenario, and will lead to a conclusion regarding what alternative – if any, could be taken to achieve a different result. The last step is to create a action plan, of which measures that could be followed the next time a similar scenario occurs.

Moreover, Kolb's Cycle of Reflective Practice (1984) is a model to support individuals to learn from their experiences. It may be utilised as the foundation to organise thoughts. Kolb's model is divided into four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualism and active experimentation, each of which must be completed before the cycle progresses to new experiences and rotates back around (University of Hull Library, 2022). The first stage is to experience something, then to reflect upon the experience - thinking about how it made the individual feel and any links with prior experience and knowledge. Afterwards is to learn from the experience itself – acknowledging parts that went well and parts that did not go well. The last stage is about putting what has been learnt into practice – where analysis and explanation become plans and actions for the future.

Barriers to reflection

University of Cambridge Libraries (n.d) gathered that there are barriers when it comes to professionals reflecting. One of which is lack of skill, many individuals who may be beginners when it comes to reflection are concerned that that are doing it incorrectly or are unsure where to begin. Few popular models of reflection can create high expectations about how the activity should be carried out. Experimenting and remembering there are different ways to reflect is a way of overcoming this barrier.

Overall, there are advantages and disadvantages to using reflective practice models. An advantage to reflection is practitioners seek to improve their practice and knowledge; it supports other practitioners from knowledge shared with others. The individuals strengths and weaknesses are highlighted, on which they can then make changes. However, there are also disadvantages to reflection, for example, some practitioners may be unsure on how to undertake reflective practice due to lack of skill or confidence to document their thoughts.

Conclusion

It is proposed that by using the strategies outlined in this briefing paper, individuals may be prepared to begin reflecting. Working in childcare settings reflection is an important ability to have, and as a practitioner, reflection on practice ensures that all children receive the best possible care and education. Professional growth and identity may be found upon reflection, as well as support to improve knowledge. Children's holistic development, stages, needs and preferences could also be better understood when practitioners utilise reflection in practice. This briefing paper aims to help support practitioners conduct reflective practice in early years settings, and with the mentioned reflective models and theory behind reflective practice they should be able to do so.

Theory and reflective practice

Reflection, according to Hickson (2011), is a mirror image used to reflect thinking in order to analyse experiences and practice. They point out that since there is no definite definition, it might be interpreted differently depending on theoretical perspectives. The 'reflective conversation', or the responsive interchange between thinking and acting, was highlighted by Schon (1983) as an insight into reflective practice. This reflective discussion serves as an introduction to the data of reflective practice.

Schon's work (1983) is traced to the idea of the reflective practitioner. He distinguished between technical reason and experience, arguing that this is an essential component of professional development. Based on theorist Dewey's work, Schon claimed that reflection was necessary for learning through experiential knowledge. He identified two types of reflection: reflection on action and reflection in action (Craft, 2002).

Furthermore, reflection-on action is known as reflection on a situation or experience after it has occurred. In this situation, professionals consider occurred in the scenario and why they behaved the way they did, and if anything could have been done differently. Additionally, reflective writing is an analytical method in which the individual analyses their experiences and consider alternate methods to better their practice (Aubrey, K. and Riley, A, 2019).

Moreover, Schon defined reflection-in action as 'thinking on our feet', and is a process that enables professionals to modify the situation or activity they are working on as it develops. It is usually related with the feeling of being surprised. According to Schon (1983), professionals who reflect-in action reflect on unexpected events and undertake new experiments, then create a better understanding of changes in situations. Furthermore, reflection-in action is sometimes described as tacit knowledge.

Tacit Knowledge

Schon (1983) explains knowledge is usually implicit in patterns of action and sense of the situation dealt with, and that knowing appears to be reflected in actions. Similarly, the professional's day-to-day life is dependent on tacit knowledge in action. Klein (2018) states tacit knowledge tends to be less visible to individuals and falls into categories such as pattern recognition, or noticing a pattern, whether it is consciously or subconsciously.

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