

Professional Practitioner

What is reflective practice?

Being able to reflect on your practice is a valuable skill for all practitioners to have in the Early Years. Lindon and Todd, (2016) states that reflection is required to be a professional practitioner because it is where you think about your actions, how you could improve your practice and achieve positive outcomes for the children and their families.

Reflective practice is important to keep early years settings active and able to reach the expectations of a positive and engaging environment.

Reflective practice is thinking about any experiences you may have gained to learn from them and thinking about how to improve your approach and actions to these experiences as a professional practitioner in the early years. (University of Cambridge, no date). Brock, (2014) explains how difficult it can be to put a definitive meaning on what reflective practice is as it is personal, and therefore, different for everyone. It is how someone reflects on their personal values, actions and responses in practice.

Why is reflective practice important in the early years?

Welsh Government, (2017) tells us that reflection is beneficial in the early years because it is important to achieve the best outcomes from the activities that are undertaken with the children for their development and learning. When practice is reflected on, you gain awareness of your attitude and approach towards the children and other practitioners. It allows practitioners to get a valuable insight on the effect of our learning.

According to Tarrant (2013), teamwork plays a big part in effective early years practice. Reflecting on collaboration with other practitioners and working with them to improve practice can build positive relationships from sharing a wider perspective on the early years practice as professional practitioners. Reflecting as a team gives opportunities to communicate in depth which will also develop those working relationships. Implementing these skills as a whole through reflection will help to achieve the best outcomes within early years settings.

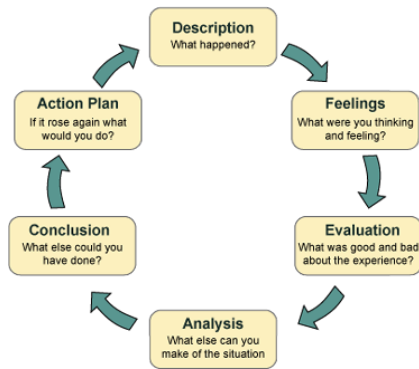
Why is reflective practice important in the early years?

Research from Marbina, Church and Tayler, (2010) shows us that reflective practice helps us as early years practitioners by thinking of our experiences throughout the day, learning from them and extending our professional understanding. When early years practitioners reflect on things they have already done, it gives them the opportunity to develop those ideas even more and improve their practice to achieve the best possible outcomes.

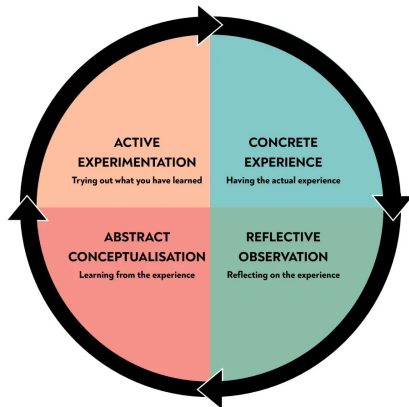
Reflection should be done every day to plan, focus and improve on early years practice. Observing children is a way to understand and achieve positive outcomes for all children when the observations are reflected upon. Observing allows us to see the development of a child, gain knowledge of what the children know and understand, get to know what they enjoy and any progress they have made. Once an observation is done, it is important to reflect on it to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the child, arrange any support that may be needed, address the targets the child has met and evaluate how effective their practice is and improve their work as a professional practitioner in the early years. Play Learn Grow, (2008).

“It is through the reflective moment that we both seek and gain insights, dynamics of wisdom and depth of meanings revealed whole to us” Johns (2009). Johns also explains that to reflect you must be present and in the moment. This makes the act of reflection beneficial to how we look at ourselves as communicators. Thinking about how we communicate as practitioners to colleagues, parents, carers, wider agencies and the children can develop social abilities and relationships.

Gibbs Reflective Cycle



Source: Crowe Associates (no date).



Source: Simply Psychology (2023)

Reflective theories

The Gibbs' model of reflection was created to support experiential learning. It helps to improve and reflect on experiences and recognises the significance of feelings in reflection. University of Cumbria (2020).

The Gibbs' model is split into 6 stages. These stages are description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. Oviawe (2020) explains that firstly, in the description you describe the events that have happened. Secondly you reflect on what you were thinking and feeling at the time. Next, in evaluation, you think what was good and what was bad about your position and approach in the situation. After that comes analysis, this is where you make sense of the situation. The next step of the Gibbs model is conclusion, what else could you have done? Finally, after all of these stages have been completed you create an action plan to prepare if this situation ever happened again, what could you do?

This model of reflection allows you to reflect in depth and critically evaluate your practice. This will result in achieving the best outcomes for the early years and practitioners. The University of Edinburgh (2023).

David Kolb created the experiential learning theory in 1984 to help us reflect and learn from experiences in practice. This model is made up of four parts which can be seen on the diagram. Kolb tells us that learning only takes place if all four stages of the model are executed. Simply Psychology (2023).

Kolb's cycle is all about learning from your experiences and can be used as a way to structure your thinking. Starting with concrete experience requiring you to have experienced something. Following on from the first stage, you then have reflective observation which is where you think about the experience and reflect on it. Next is abstract conceptualism, this is the stage where you learn from your experience. Finally, you have active experimentation where you put everything you have learnt into practice. University of Hull (2022).

Driscoll

Donald Schon (in action/on action)

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