Reflective Practice

Introduction

Our role as Early Year practitioners is to reflect on our profession, behaviour and what we can do to improve this further. Adults listening to children, and children hearing one another too is of great importance. Littelton *et al*., (2015) demonstrated this with research in Paige-Smith and Craft, (2011) book. The purpose of this briefing paper is to firstly look at, what reflective practice is, and secondly, why we reflect and how does this improve professional practice. Thirdly, exploring models of reflection, having a good understanding on how to implement these skills, and looking at the theorists. Finally, introducing reflective learning to an early year setting, concluding with our newfound knowledge, and making sure that children receive the best learning and developmental experience possible.

(Source: Race, 2002)

What is Reflection?

Reflection is an activity that can be linked back to the Greek philosophers-Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Therefore, philosophical debate originated on critical thought and reflection. The demand for reflection in numerous types of professions has become very contemporary. Particularly in training, further and higher education, where assessment is practised through reflective portfolios or learning journals and notably where practice is envisaged through reflective evaluations. Additionally, they are core values of professionals and in training are key. Reflection can be promoted through a variety of disciplines and a necessary part of professional practice particularly in education, health, and social care (Moon, 2004) in (Brock, 2015). Central to this, early years practitioners are increasingly expectant to reflect to enhance development of their practice. Nurturing and stimulating children's learning and development by observation has been a long tradition of early childhood practitioners. Twenty first century reflective practice in early years looks to become implanted as it becomes a key expectation of everyone who works alongside children's learning and development (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011). One cannot ignore the fact that there are several challenges around developing reflective practice. Making time and space to reflect may present to be difficult, also finding a level of balance through expectations of learning, so that our consequent learning and reflection are not unplanned (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2011).

Exploring Reflection and Professional Practice

One of the most important considerations of this briefing paper is how can reflection be useful and about us as professionals learning from practice. The Frobel approach is underpinned by the observation of children. Tuning into the child allows the adult to observe, interact in such a way that is sensitive and meaningful, and supporting the child's learning with observation to inform subsequent planning. Observations are paramount for the adult to ponder about, reflection and question aspects of policy and procedure. Observations of babies and young children by Froebel in his writings were detailed and with the emphasis key on observation .He identified that giving material resources was simply insufficient and that identifying the underpinning process of a child's learning and development would lead the way (Tovey, 2012) .Engaging with others from a knowledgeable value basis of early years principles and practice in dialogue, will produce early years teams working together as reflective professional practitioners (Moss, 2088b). Firstly, the child's parents would be the enduring educators considered as key in underpinning the child's learning and development (DFES, 2008). Central to the child's well-being, parents and families are recognized by the EYFS curriculum. Practitioners who can develop these relationships further, can offer support by extended learning at home through sharing information (Hallet, 2013). Additionally, there are several stakeholders interested in the standards of early years services, supernational organisations, national government, local government, leaders, managers, practitioners, parents and most importantly the children (Cottle and Alexander, 2012) in (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016).

What is a Model of Reflection?

Let us begin by considering, what is a model of reflection. A practitioner requires the knowledge to know that critical reflection is necessary to become adept at it. There are a few models of whereby developing the method of critical reflection that can be adapted to organise thinking and develop critically, for example the American philosopher John Dewey and Donald Alan Schon (Brock, 2015). A few theorists who have proposed cyclical models. Most have the key features of Kolb's model, which itself originated from Lewin (Gibbs, 2013). In this briefing paper we are going to explore Kolb's and Gibbs models of reflection.

Kolb's Model of Reflection (1984)

The first aspect to note in Kolb's model are the four stages in learning which are cyclical, as seen in the diagram. Reviewing and reflecting from a practical or concrete experience will therefore give you the previous or new knowledge to then apply the theory by describing the experience. As a result, you partake in abstract conceptualisation which actively will guide you to experiment or attempt what you have learned. This can occur swiftly, or over days, weeks or months dependent on the event or topic and there could possibly be a 'wheels within wheels' procedure at the very same time (Brock, 2015). These terms are labelled in four stages, they arise from Kolb's Experimental Learning Theory, and when present in this succession they form the experimental learning cycle. The learner can enter the cycle at any moment, but all stages must be conducted in sequence (Gibbs, 2013). According to Morris (2020, p. 1064-1077), "Kolb's experiential learning cycle is perhaps the most scholarly influential and cited model regarding experiential learning theory". Notably there are key issues in interpreting the model; and concerns over the lack of clarity in respect of what constitutes a concrete experience. A review of a systematic literature was conducted to examine what constitutes a concrete experience. Five themes were revealed from the analysis: learners are involved, active, participants: Knowledge is situated in place and time; novel experiences are exposed to learners; risk is involved; demands of learners require specified

real-world problems: and critical reflection could quite possibly serve as a mediator in meaningful learning. Therefore, a proposal of revision to Kolb's model would be necessary; experiential learning consists of contextually rich solid experience; observation of critical reflection, contextual-specific abstract conceptualization and experimentation that is pragmatic active (Morris, 2020). Shown below is Kolb's model of reflection and an explanation of the four stages of cyclical learning. Once a person has worked through the four stages of the cycle progressively, effective learning is observed (McCleod, 2017)

- Concrete Experience: A new situation or experience is encountered, or existing experience reinterpreted.
- Reflective Observation of the New Experience: Particularly important to consider any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.
- Abstract Conceptualization: Reflection ascends to a new idea, or modification of an existing abstract concept.
- Active Experimentation: Applying the idea and awaiting the outcome.

(Source: Simplypsychology, 2017)

Gibbs model of Reflection (1988)

Firstly, Gibbs's model portrays Kolb's ideas together with a fundamental twist (A framework in which there is a four staged cyclical framework: concrete experience, observation and reflection, testing formed abstract concepts in new situations). Referring specifically from Gibbs model, the key process within reflection, as opposed to reflection as a process included in general learning. As you can see from the diagram shown below, Gibb's model splits into six key stages, assuming a repetitive experimental context (Oviawe, 2020).

- Description: Location, actions, participants, witnesses, context, and results.
- Feeling and Thought: During the event, at the time, how other people made you feel, feelings about the outcome and what you feel now.
- Evaluation: Evaluate, consider what was good or bad and what didn't go well.
- Analysis: Explore separately the broken-down components, what went well, what others did well and in what way did participants contribute.
- Conclusion: Exploring, to base judgment on the event, insight into the behaviour of all participants in the event and how they contributed to the outcome.
- Action plan: Planning for encountering the event again.

(Source: NursingAnswers.net, 2018)

Through organised reflection and the event occurring again, it will be centre to a further reflective cycle. Bridging the gap between theory and practice is brought about through reflection, determining what does and does not work (Oviawe, 2020).

Introducing Reflection to an Early Years Setting

Often, there may be obstacles to reflective practice, finding time, being equipped with the right materials and being unsure of introducing reflective practice are to name a few. Consider using a reflective diary which can obtain a variety of personal developments, thoughts, experiences, feelings, and reflections (Bolton, 2014) in (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2016). Thinking of activities that have been explored with children, consider what you have learned through the models of reflection in this briefing paper and how the outcome could have been different. In Wales CSSIW, there are four quality themes and practitioners must complete a Self-Assessment of Service Survey before inspection. These comprise of: Wellbeing, Care and Development, Environment, Leadership and Management. These themes are an important component when reflecting and should be at the heart of practice. Additionally, peer support would be a powerful tool to reflect with, talking with colleagues, sharing ideas, and supporting each other. Relationships that are positive with other practitioners when reflection is exhibited will promote new knowledge and extend practice (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2016). Professional conversations in daily meetings for the team would be beneficial for reflective thinking and dialogue to be undertaken. Reflective questions will give the opportunity for engagement, possible questions for reflection: when the meetings could take place, the agenda, reflecting over children's progression, meeting with children for reflection, meeting parents for shared progression and reflection about their children, thinking about how effective meetings are and has anyone got any recommendations to improve practice. Furthermore, reading vocationally professional journals and magazines, research journals and reports, and academic literature and having reflective conversations about your findings and newfound knowledge will be another example of reflective practice in your early years workplace (Hallet, 2013).

Conclusion of this briefing paper

To conclude from this briefing paper, reflective practice is an invaluable activity that Early Years Practitioners need to continuously carry out to learn, understanding the needs of others to change behaviour. One cannot ignore the fact that reflection enhances practice, nurturing and developing children through observation has been a belief that early childhood practitioners have held in high regard. Looking at the theorists, Gibbs supports Kolb's model implementing the four staged cyclical framework, however Gibbs model demands more effort to support the process. Suggesting action plans and learning contracts and including debate and co-workers and self-assessment. This indicates the key process in reflection assuming a repetitive experimental context bridging the gap between theory and practice. Given these points the children, parents, peer support, colleagues, staff meetings, reflective diaries and sharing ideas are key in how effective your reflective practice will be. As a final point this briefing paper is to support practitioners as professionals in continuing practice, exploring reflective practice, sharing the ideas and knowledge of theorists, giving examples and tools to explore this further, enhancing their abilities to support children and giving them the confidence to introduce reflection in their Early Years.

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