

Reflective Practice

The first aspect to note is that reflection is a continued process and a very important part of a professional practitioner's role in the early years. When working with children, practitioners want them to have the best possible start in life and the very best care possible for them to develop and learn. A professional practitioner, using reflective practice will provide the standards to help achieve this. It is considered, reflection is a thought process, thinking about what has been done, and critically thinking about how it can be changed, developed and improved. It is important, as it benefits the development of the child, but also helps parents and families to understand the development of their child. Therefore, parents and carers witness this professionalism, it gives them confidence and helps to build that crucial relationship with the practitioner. Reflective practice can help children to achieve better outcomes, improve their self-awareness and self-esteem, build their confidence and have their needs met. It also develops and improves the practice of the practitioner, improving confidence and motivation, learning new skills and identifying training needs through continued professional development. (Pacey,2016)

Trodd *et al.* (2016,) claims that being a reflective practitioner is a powerful aspect of the early years professional. Using reflection in practice can support communication and participation with colleagues, families and multi-agencies, making valuable contributions towards the provision for children and their families. Central to this, It is important to recognise the significance to develop one's own identity and practice when working in the early years setting with other practitioners. Describing and analysing practice are key aspects of reflection, they can support and improve future situations. Practitioners have a responsibility to meet the needs of the child and families, using reflection can support decision making and making a difference in their lives.

The purpose for reflection is to improve the understanding of teaching, working with children and providing quality provision for the child, creating enjoyable learning experiences for the child. Practitioners in the early years need to reflect on their personal values, actions and responses to be successful in delivering a curriculum that benefits the children in their care, reflection needs to be meaningful so that it is purposeful and relates to the work practitioners do with children and their families. Good reflective practice, as stated, can promote professional development, promotion and career opportunities. It should be a continual practice and ongoing to become a successful practitioner. Brock, (2016).

The Early Years Workforce Plan states that it will encourage practitioners to use standards to reflect on their practice, therefore identifying areas for professional development and supporting them to acquire and develop new skills. In schools, training can be identified and learning opportunities will be offered. To plan and guide children's learning, it is clear that practitioner's must reflect on their practice and change to suit the learning of the children. All children learn different ways, by using reflection you can identify and change your practice to suit the developmental need of the child. Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage.(2021)

Pilcher, (2021) states that a practitioner who uses reflection, have the same characteristics similar to them described in children's learning, found in The Early Years Foundation Stage for children's learning and this is noted in Kolb's theory in his reflective cycle.



These characteristics are described as engagement, motivation and thinking. The theory shows that it is not a separate activity, but a whole thinking process that requires involvement in practice. Kolb argues that we learn from our experiences and his theory is based on experience, evaluating and improving in three stages, resulting from that experience the cycle starts again. There are four stages to Kolb's reflective cycle: Concrete experience is identifying the need to reflect immediately, to develop and learn something new, acknowledging how one can see,

feel and think. Reflective observation is recording on paper the activity, describing and critically thinking about what happened, therefore, asking critical questions on what has been observed. Abstract conceptualization follows on from the previous stage, but asking questions for improvement, if the situation occurred again, what can be done differently. It can give the practitioner the opportunity to develop new strategies and skills. The final stage is called Active experimentation, this is created by practising and developing different theories from the questions asked and knowledge learned during the reflective process. This becomes the new concrete experience and the cycle continues. However, Kolb argues that the cycle is only effective if all four parts of the stages are executed. In other words, using one part of the cycle will not be adequate and show a true reflection of the situation. To truly learn new knowledge, in a situation, the four stages have to be experienced, questioning your practice creates new experiences and a new cycle begins. Brown,(no date)



Furthermore, another famous theorist is Graham Gibbs, he developed the reflective cycle in 1988 to give structure to learning experiences. It offers a framework based on repeated experiences, similar to Kolb, allowing planning and strategies to change when a similar situation arises, however it can be just as valuable for a single experience also. The six stages of Gibbs' cycle of reflection consist of description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. The first stage is to describe the experience, gather all the information required about the activity, where was this taking place and what outcomes were trying to be achieved. The second stage is exploring feelings and thoughts, what did it make you think about? How did it make you feel? These questions can have an impact on the next activity. Next, is to evaluate and question what was successful and worked well, but also what needs improvement for the future. Gibbs states that for this part of the cycle, the practitioner has to be objective and honest to have the best possible reflection in practice. The next step is analysis, to make sense of what happened and target specific details of the activity or situation. It gives the practitioner the opportunity to identify things that worked well and did not. The next stage is conclusion, to summarise what has been learned and improve the situation, make changes for outcomes to turn out different. Finally, an action plan should be created, focusing on what will be done differently but also how. The University of Edinburgh, (2021)

According to John Dewey, reflection is an added process of thoughts and he believed that people needed to develop their thought process. He states that it is important to think effectively and reflect in a purposeful way. Building on the experiences with more experience over time. He argues, reflection is all about thinking, enabling a deeper understanding. Problem solving, it is an active process, sequences of interconnected ideas and underlying beliefs. Being open minded and reasoning and ordering of thoughts. He stated that if you do not reflect on your practice you risk prejudice, out of date or uninformed thinking. Through critical reflection on practice, your work is ethical and responsible. Brock, (2016)

Schon states that reflective practice is a crucial characteristic of professional practice and reflection is key and necessary for continuous learning. His theories on reflection are about practice, knowledge and experience through tacit knowing-in-action, reflection – in – action and reflection on action. Therefore, reflecting while doing something or reflecting after it has been done is seen as an important element of knowledge. Knowing what theories are used and embedded, tacit knowledge and reflection-in-action guides practitioner's practice when working with children. As a professional practitioner, these are there due to skills gained, experience and knowledge developed over time. Schon explains that communicating with work colleagues and having discussions the practitioner will gain the attributes of a reflective practitioner, Hallet,(2016).

A professional practitioner, working in the early years, that uses a model for reflective practice gains a questioning approach to their practice. It also identifies strengths but also areas for development within their setting. Every activity will be planned carefully, based on previous experiences and research learned. It is important to consider that the models used are a repeating cycle, therefore, each experience is new and different, gaining different learning styles, knowledge and skills.

According to Hallet, (2013) due to government policy changes and reform, this can produce new ideas and provide new opportunities to reflect on daily practice. When a new policy is introduced, reflective practice is used to identify what is already in place and what needs to be implemented. Reflection is having the ability to look back and question, creating new ways of improving and delivering a more professional practice, having. Pilcher, (2012) states that an important part of reflection is communicating with work colleagues, families and other professionals from multi-agencies. Although this can be formal, the informal conversation with a work colleague can also be invaluable, helping the practitioner to build a positive relationship with the child. Conversations-these happen often during the day, reflecting on what has happened. This can lead to a more in depth conversation where more information is shared and improve one's understanding and practice.

Pacey, (2016) suggests there can be barriers in reflective practice. Therefore, it can be beneficial to think of a strategy that best suits the practitioner when starting reflective practice. The use of a reflective diary can be a beneficial starting point when first using reflection in your practice. This is where one can record their thoughts and feelings of the experience, Bolton, (incited in Pacey 2016), of the activity, but more importantly the what, how and why questions. Social Care Wales, (2016) mentions one of the key areas for development is self-assessment and reflective practice. Reviewing and reflecting on development and learning activities is one of the principles in CPD. It also states, in the Seven Steps of CPD, to implement learning opportunities the practitioner should have a learning log or diary which can be completed on a daily basis.

Peer observation is a good way to reflect on one's practice, ensure the observation is focused and short, give constructive feedback, identify good practice and establish the areas needed for development. It is suggested, when using the Gibbs reflective model, to create a personal action plan at the end of this cycle. Write down questions and key points, identify strengths and areas for improvement so that when similar situations arise again, the practitioner has the opportunity to change the outcome. The University of Edinburgh, (2021).

Brock, (2015) believes that reflection is not something new, but has been around for many years, going as far back as the Greek philosophers who looked at critical thought and reflection. It is in great demand and there is a need to reflect and evaluate on a practice in many different professions, Reflection and reflective practice are identified as core values and is an important part of a professional's development.

In conclusion, reflective practice is a form of continued professional development. It is an essential part of a professional practitioners' role and development in an early years setting. It is a constant cycle of self-awareness and self-improvement, striving to deliver planning and a curriculum that meets the needs of the child. Early years practitioners want the very best for the children in their care, creating an environment that makes them feel happy and safe so they can develop and learn as they grow. Reflection is seen as an important part of this, it is a thought process, critical thinking and questioning skills are required to successfully achieve this. Although this can be seen as daunting, it can become a positive part of your professional development. It supports invaluable communication when working with colleagues, and is vitally important when meeting with families and carers. The models on reflection by different theorists is a powerful tool to adopt and increase your skills when using reflection in your daily practice. The Welsh Government want to see highly skilled practitioners working with children and the WG identify reflection as an essential part of that practice.

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