

The importance of reflective practice as a professional practitioner in the early years' workforce

Reflection in early years settings

All practitioners are expected to use reflection in the early years' workforce. As stated by Lindon (2012, p. 2) Reflective practice is frequently described as being thoughtful about one's own practice almost exclusively. Your current beliefs, presumptions, and habits are used to express the sense of challenges. According to Hallet (2013, p. 26), through reading, engaging in conversation with others while considering theory, research, and how these relate to practice, reflection gives practitioners a chance to evaluate the environment in which they work in and improve it. Campbell- Barr and Leeson (2016a, p. 105) believes we should be open about our own strong belief that reflecting is an effective and crucial activity that promotes deeper understanding, which in turn promotes informed, secure practice and significant personal and professional growth. Campbell- Barr and Leeson (2016b, p. 105) also suggest that through practicing reflectively, practitioners can progress from being a competent professional to a creative, thoughtful, and proactive individual who is able to reflect and evaluate on their work and significantly change the lives of the children and families they cooperate with.

What is Reflection

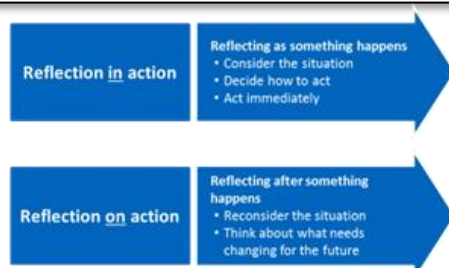
A professional practitioner must have the ability to reflect in practice. Brock (2015a, p. 7) believes that reflection and reflective practice are important components of professional development. Reflection is encouraged across a variety of professions, but is especially important in the professions of education and health and social care. Being able to analyze how changes will affect the children and families you work with as well as your working methods is a crucial professional skill. (Brock, 2015b. p. 22). According to Roffey-Barentsen and Malthouse (2020, p. 13) by having the skill of reflection, you will understand how reflective practice helps you with learning, problem solving, critical thinking, organization, and your own change management. Moon (2005a, p. 5) states that "reflection" refers to the method of combining a range of prior knowledge or thought in order to recognise it more effectively for a purpose that may go beyond one's own previous knowledge or thought. The University of Hull (2022) argues that we engage in reflection as a result to gain self - confidence as this will support us in engaging in future reflection.

Theories of Reflection

The work of Schön offers a theory of reflection. This is recognised as the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

Firstly, reflecting on the experience while it still has the potential to help with learning is known as reflection-in-action. Instead of thinking about how you can change activities in the future, this is done during lessons or on the spot (University of Cambridge, 2014a). Schön (1992, p.50) describes the theory of reflection-in-action as the "art" through which practitioners sometimes handle situations of ambiguity, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict is centered. Schön follows by explaining that our actions reflect our knowledge. A professional's daily work life also relies on the reflection of knowing-in action.

Secondly, reflection-on-action involves thinking about how practice may be enhanced after the activity or lesson has been taught. The University of Cambridge (2014c) explains the theory of reflection-on-action should support practitioners to reflect and encourage them to produce ideas for future improvements. This involves practitioners re-evaluating the situation and investigating further in-depth about what is required to support the students that misunderstood the subject.



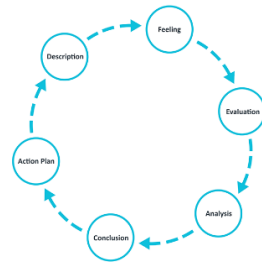
Source: University of Cambridge (2014b)

Models of Reflection

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

One of the most used models of reflection is the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle. Gibb's Reflective Cycle leads you through six stages which allows you to reflect effectively. (The University of Edinburgh, 2020a) These include:

- Description,
- Feelings,
- Assessment,
- Analysis,
- Conclusion,
- Action plan.



Source: (The University of Edinburgh, 2020b)

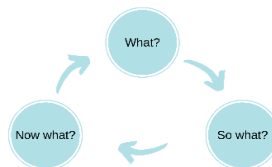
According to University of Cumbria (2020), Gibbs' Reflective Cycle was designed for practitioners to use to reflect on a recurrent experience for improvement in future practice. One of the strongest points is that Gibb's acknowledges the importance of feelings-in-reflection. Gibbs' model is a useful tool reflect on an experience. These stages apply for all practitioners with different experiences. If this reflective model is used for a single experience, the action plan may become more focused on how you can implement it to your conclusion for future use. (University of Edinburgh, 2020c)

Driscoll's What Model

According to University of Cambridge (2022b) it is generally considered that Driscoll's What Model is another popular, straightforward model of reflection progressed in the mid-1990s. This model includes three what questions, these are:

- What?
- So What?
- Now What?

Source: University of Cambridge (2022a)



Following this the University of Cambridge (2022) gives us an explanation that we must outline our events and experiences in order to put it in perspective. This gives us a better understanding of what circumstances are ahead of us. The model asks us to reflect on our situations by asking ourselves 'so what,' did we learn from our experience? Finally, we can think about what actions we will undertake due to the reflection on our actions. It is crucial to consider that there may be no changes due to our reflection and we are doing things appropriately in every situation.

Reflection in professional practice

Tarrant (2013) believes that thinking through practice can lead to the conclusion that you should keep on doing what you have been doing beforehand as it could be correct and there may not be any way to improve. knowing these reasons why your practice has worked quite well can allow you to concentrate on recreating these factors for success. Wilson (2016) states early years practitioners create techniques of reflection, both in their professional responsibilities and through academic training which help practitioners extract lessons from their experiences at work. For this form of reflection, honesty and objectivity are essential to have value. This suggests that practitioners are receptive to continuous learning rather than being defensive about certain situations. Smith and Craft (2008) argue that reflection, improving and changing our practice is necessary to essential to successful practice. In an early years setting, where practitioners communicate and work with one another frequently, it provides opportunity to compare and evaluate interpretations on the same activity. Moon (2005b) explains that in early years, teacher education has been shown to have a greater interest in reflective practice. One might say that this interest is related to the work role of teacher educators in some way, possibly far more than teaching itself. Reed and Canning (2009) explain how it is important to reflect on our own performance as a method of improving and developing personally. Once we have more of an understanding of the insight through our reflections, we can improve our knowledge and become better practitioners. Reflective practice is an important part of our professional practice and we develop this most effectively when we are surrounded by a learning community where other practitioners are listening and sharing their opinions and experiences to input their thought on others professional practice.

Conclusion

All of this points to the conclusion that using reflection in professional practice is an important skill to build on and increase your knowledge on how to reflect more effectively in practice. Reflection is an essential skill to use as an early years practitioner and using this skill will allow you to present the best care and learning for all children in the early years settings. Becoming a reflective practitioner will allow you to increase your professional development more and allow you to focus more during your practice. Practicing being a reflective practitioner will allow you to become a professional practitioner who is able to reflect and evaluate and use these skills to work significantly well with children and families.

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