

The importance of reflective practice in the early years workforce

The Importance of Reflection and Reflective Practice in The Early Years

What is reflection and reflective practice?

Brock (2015) shows that reflection and reflective practice play a crucial part in the early years. Reflection is easy to understand as it has a similar meaning in every context. Reflecting on your work is just like looking in a mirror at your reflection. When you look at your reflection in the mirror, you're looking back at what represents you. This is the same as reflecting on your work as when you are reflecting on your work, you are looking back at what you represent. Chang (2019) states that reflection is going back to revisit your work and what you have learned, for improvements and further learning. He also states that it's not just looking back at what happened it is also taking it in and acting upon it. It is very common for people to reflect on past events to try and figure out what went wrong and how not to repeat the mistakes in the future. Lindon and Trodd (2016) show that reflective practice is a personal and a shared experience. The personal side is because the process cannot be reflective if you're in the presence of another adult or practitioner. However, it can also be a shared experience as there may be other practitioners or professionals that are self-aware and can provide you with advice and solutions to any problems that you might have to overcome. The three main types of reflective practice are reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action.

Why is it important to Early Years practice?

Reflective practice is an integral part of being an effective early years practitioner. Reflective practice is beneficial to practitioners as it can positively impact their self-awareness which is critical to help develop emotional intelligence and a better understanding of people. Gunning (2022) supports this by explaining that reflective practice helps gain insight and develop our knowledge. By using reflection, the practitioner is able to support the child throughout their early years by using these skills to improve their practice, therefore giving the best holistic support.

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Theory?

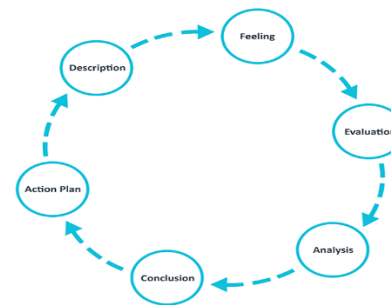
Schon (2016) explains that early years practitioners are more hands-on with their job as they know more than they can say. This shows that practitioners automatically use reflective practice without intention as they are aware of the benefits and how it can help them and guide them with the teaching. Schon adds to this by explaining that practitioners do not often have a set method or plan, they do what is right and learn from their mistakes. Practitioners often use trial and error in their job as this is an affective method. This works for practitioners as it is very common for activities not to turn out as planned when working with children. This is due to the fact that all children are different and there is not one method that works for all. Schon also has a reflective model theory. He believes that there is 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action'. Reflecting in action is reflecting as something happens. LibGuides (2022) explains that this is where you would witness the experience itself, consider the situation, make a decision on how to act and then carry this out immediately. Using this method is beneficial as the practitioner is not likely to forget the experience and will be able to give a credible description. However, reflecting in action could also mean that the practitioner misses something crucial. This may happen as a child may do something that needs to be documented however the practitioner may have not seen it as they were busy writing notes of reflection. Reflecting on action is where the practitioner reflects on a situation after it happens. This is where the practitioner will reconsider the experience and analyse it. During this they will be thinking of what went well, what could be improved and how to improve it. This is beneficial as it allows the practitioner to find solutions and learn from their mistakes.

Reflective models

The University of Edinburgh (2020) explains Gibbs' Reflective Cycle theory (1988). Gibbs' theory covered six stages of reflection. The description of the experience, the thoughts and feelings from the experience, evaluation of the experience, analysis to understand the situation, conclusion to allow an action plan to be formed and creating the action plan.

Institute for Experiential Learning (2023) shows Kolb's Experiential Cycle. They explain that his cycle has four steps. The steps are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. This learning process is so natural that people engage in it without intention.

Both reflection methods are useful. Gibbs' theory is more in touch with people's feelings and emotions however, Kolb's theory is very much how things went practically.



(The University of Edinburgh (2020))



(Institute for Experiential Learning, 2023)

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