

What is Reflection?

Brock (2014) explains that reflection is a critical skill that all practitioners should gain in Early Years settings. It will develop through experience and time. For any reflection to be of value and have a successful purpose, it must be understood and reflected in a way it means something. This means it must be relatable to the work provided by the practitioner to the children.

Hallet (2013) states that reflection is important. It is important because an early years environment is continuously changing, therefore to be able to adapt to this forever changing environment a professional practitioner need to reflect on situations as a they occur. An early years practitioner has to gain confidence to reflect on their own but also to reflect as a team. Reflecting as a team will allow the best possible way of working in a multi professional way.

Why is Reflection important?

Reflection is important as the world we live in is continuously changing. These changes are continuously occurring in all Early Year settings. Policies and guidelines are updated, and the professional practitioner needs to reflect on the changes by adapting to the changes in an efficient way but also in a professional way.

Envy and Walters (2013) explains that a confident practitioner will ask questions to help with reflection. Some of the questions that may be asked are, What went well? What did not go well? Why is there a problem? and How do I feel about this situation? Reflection is not only looking back at the day or the situation it involves going back through the actions taken, the conversations that took place and how everybody involved was feeling and reflecting on all these results. By reflecting on the details, the situation, issue, or problems the outcome from the reflection can be changed and resolved. New ways of working are needed sometimes. These new ways need to be adapted to include all staff, children, and families, therefore the best way that suits everybody. The results of successful reflecting can improve professional knowledge, to improve future planning, identify what could be improved in the setting and develop some skills further. These thinking and reflection findings can be recorded to be referred to later.

Reflection within professional practice

Most tasks undertaken by a professional practitioner are done automatic, sometimes without much thought into why they are being done. By becoming a reflective practitioner, it helps to understand why these tasks are being carried out and understanding the thought process behind the task. It can also lead to further development or change, leading to a much better improved provisions being provided to the children.

Brodie and Savage (2015) suggest that taking a fresh look at a situation in the setting by discussing with colleagues and other members of the team helps to resolve issues and problems. Reflecting as a team may have a few more ideas and findings than individual reflection. All the information gathered can be reflected and the results may be a much improved outcome for the setting and the situation.

They also state that there is nothing more important than honesty and continual reflection on the work the practitioners undertake in the setting. There are always fresh and new challenges to respond to but it is how these challenges are dealt with is what is important. Professional practitioners should have the confidence to use different judgments, using the experiences, what has been seen and heard and reflecting on all these skills.

Reflection within the early years setting

According to Barber and Paul-Smith (2010) the most important task of any early years setting is observations. All observations on children can be reflected and then can be linked to planning. Observations should not be seen as a chore or a task that is routinely done but an opportunity to get to know the children better. Getting to know the likes and dislikes, the personality and what their strengths and weaknesses are. A practitioner needs to understand the purpose of the observations and the reasoning behind the observations when reflecting. By constantly reflecting the practitioner will gain experience and confidence on how to observe effectively within the setting. The constant observing and reflecting will gain helpful knowledge of the children in the setting resulting in good decisions for the next steps in the learning goals and journey of the child. Planning needs to be spontaneous and flexible to accommodate each child.

Thornton and Brunton (2014) believes that in the Reggio Emilio approach is a key factor in contributing to the development of the children in a setting. They feel that the role of the practitioner is not only to teach but to also learn from the children too. Having continuous discussions with colleagues will improve knowledge and gain confidence to take responsibility for ones own professional development. By reflecting improvements can be made to what the setting provides the children, the practitioners can also improve what provisions can be offered to the children. Improvements can also be made on how a practitioner communicates and connects with the children in a way that it is positive towards the child, is sensitive to the feelings of the child and not judging the child. Being a reflective practitioner improves how the practitioner builds on the relationship with the children and adults. Understanding the individual child and how the child learns and develops. It increases knowledge and the understanding what the best approach is to extend the learning opportunities across all areas of learning. It helps to meet the needs of the child, expanding the learning styles and interests of the child. Building a better relationship with parents, carers and sometimes the wider community. Improving communications with other professionals outside of the setting and this will lead to better qualified staff who will have access to opportunities for continuous professional reflection to develop a higher standard of care. Being able to learn from each other within a setting shows a great role model for the children. Sharing observations and listening carefully to your colleagues' opinions can help with reflection as the more information is available the more effective the decision making becomes. This is improved because everybody has contributed to the outcome.

Brodie and Savage (2015) are convinced that to be successful at inclusion in a setting a wide range of ideas and information must be considered. This can be achieved by reflecting on the ideas and information and adapting them to include the best result and that the decisions made is fit for purpose. Inclusive practice is only successful when all perceptions, views, hopes, and fears are addressed and taken in to account and reflected upon. It is only then a successful result can be achieved, and the problems can be resolved. Situations can only continue to change and be improved by continuous reflection by the practitioners in the setting.

Models and theories of reflection

There are so many models of reflection that can be of great help when reflecting. Every model has something different and special to contribute to the process of reflection. Tovey (2013) believes that brining Froebel approach into the early years setting have set the way in how we reflect and improve on activities today. Froebel wanted children to grow and develop at their own pace, but with help of knowledgeable adults to give them support when needed. Children learn the most in the early years of the child educational life and by reflecting on these situations' improvements can be made to activities which are child led, encouraging further discussions with the child and enhance the play factor. Activities such as sand, clay, water, blocks, drawing, painting, and outdoor play have all been linked back to Froebel. From these activities by reflecting on them the activities, practices such as observational-led planning, improved partnerships with parents and the community have also been improved and implemented.

Aubrey and Riley (2019) suggest that Schon theory is a great example of a reflective theory. Recognising the knowledge, the practitioner has is the first basic importance. This wealth of knowledge can then be used to encourage the best development of any workplace. He encouraged organisations to look at situations differently, not just to take them on face value. He encouraged reflection as this is an important tool in looking further into a situation by asking questions. He believed this cannot stay the same forever and that reflecting was the most effective skill that could improve situations and provide new outcomes. Schon theory has two parts, the first is reflection in practice and the second reflection on practice. When a professional practitioner reflects in practice the practitioner is reflecting on the actual activity taking place with the children and when reflecting on practice the practitioner is reflecting on the activity with the children away from the activity or after the completion of the activity. Reflecting in these different ways a reflective practitioner becomes more knowledgeable. This is achieved by linking practices to theories, by further developing personally and finding new ways of working with the children and others.

There are many models of reflection some are similar, and some are very different. They are used as a starting point for a practitioner to help with reflection. The models all include similar stages and the one used the most by practitioners are The Gibbs Reflective Cycle. It was created in 1988 by Graham Gibbs a research leader in the Department of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Huddersfield. The Reflective Cycle is made up of six stages. The stages are, descriptions, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. Envy and Walters (2013) explains that by following the Gibbs Reflective Cycle and the six stages the best outcome possible can be achieved. It is not only beneficial to just have the experience to learn from, if no reflection takes place, then the potential learning skills may be lost, and an opportunity missed to improve and develop the problem or situation. This reflection cycle therefore improves the outcome for the practitioner, the children, their families and for the setting.

Another important and helpful reflective model is Kolb's Experiential Cycle. The model has four stages, they are, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The model encourages experiences and developing understanding from these experiences. The cycle starts with an existing experience or a previous experience then reflecting on the experience by making a note of what was good or what could have been done differently and can be improved upon for next time. After reflecting, all the knowledge gained, and the new experiences learnt can then be put into practice. This shows that what has been learnt has directly come from the reflecting process.

REFLECTIVE ACCOUNTS FORM

You must use this form to record five written reflective accounts on your CPD and/or practice-related feedback and/or an event or experience in your practice and how this relates to the Code. Please fill in a page for each of your reflective accounts. Making sure you do not include any information that might identify a specific patient, service user or colleague. Please refer to our guidance on preserving anonymity in Guidance sheet 1. It is time to revalidate with the GMC.

Reflective account:

What was the nature of the CPD activity and/or practice-related feedback and/or event or experience in your practice?

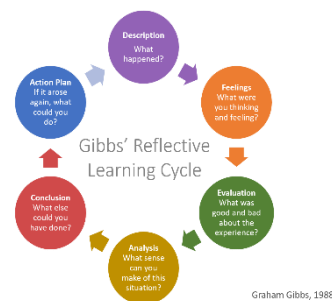
What did you learn from the CPD activity and/or feedback and/or event or experience in your practice?

How did you change or improve your practice as a result?

How is this relevant to the Code?
Relevant one or more domains: Promote equality – Promote safety – Promote professional standards and trust

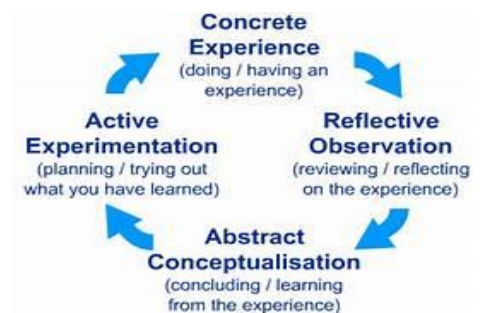
(NHSGGC Practice Education 2020)

Making notes when reflecting as a practitioner is a good skill. This can be recorded on a reflective form. This will help with reflecting if notes have been made of the experience, good or bad and what was learnt along the way. Here is an example of a reflective form. This is a helpful way of keeping a record of all the information if the practitioner needs to look back on the experience later.



Gibbs Reflective cycle (1988)

helendebheld.files.wordpress.com



Kolb Reflective Cycle (1984)-Medical-interviews.co.uk

To conclude, by using the methods and theories mentioned they will help provide the confidence and knowledge needed to reflect. Reflection is a skill that will improve from experience and confidence. As a professional practitioner and continuously reflecting the level of service is the best possible that can be provided. It also ensures the best care is always given and the best learning experiences is provided to the children at the setting. Reflection can improve the professional practitioner own knowledge and can improve professional development by increasing confidence. Reflecting also helps with gaining knowledge about the children in the setting through observations. It helps gain knowledge on the child development stage, their needs to help and the needs for future planning.

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