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Reflection in the early years.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the significance of reflective practice to facilitate professional development in the early year's workforce.

Reflection is an ancient Greek concept which can be traced back to the three Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle from two thousand five hundred years ago. It has an exceptionally long history, John Dewey an American philosopher, psychologist and education reformer recorded his theories as far back as 1890's.

Reflective practice is a vital aspect of working with children. Practitioners reflect in many ways to enhance their professional development and knowledge. This then impacts the way they care for children and the quality of provision they provide. Reflecting on practice gives the best outcomes for children. It not only benefits them, but it can go on to benefit the practitioner, colleagues, parents, and other outside professionals we work with.

According to (Brookfield, 1995, p25) The purpose of reflective practice is to provide a better experience for children. By making informed decisions a practitioner can see if their provision is effective or not,

Reflection is important to ensure children's needs are always being met and that current provision guidelines are working. Reflection helps the setting stay updated and check they are always following policies and procedures. Everyone working within the early years should reflect, A high quality setting with well experienced practitioners should still encourage them to build on experience through reflection and continuous professional development. Undertaking training and courses, attending workshops and conferences with others in the same profession helps learn from others and experiences. Reflecting on how children interact with each other and how a practitioner interacts with them and enhances their play and learning.

(Moon 2006) says being a reflective practitioner reflects someone's behaviour and is not a sign of someone intelligence. Therefore, it is important for a practitioner to see reflecting as a positive step and not negatively at what you may have done wrong. This shows it is beneficial for everyone to reflect on their practice regardless of how long they have worked within the early years.

To reflect and evaluate practice it can identify if changes need to be made for additional support and future planning asking how we can improve and how we can make things better?

Examples of Theorists on reflection

Dewey (1933) believed in continuous reflection and that we do not learn from experience. He believed in the hands-on approach and that if you are not reflective as a practitioner you are at risk of basing practice on old ways and are uninformed and outdated. He promoted the view that children learn through experience and so children would learn through actively engaging in an experience rather than being told about it or reading about it in a book.

By critically reflecting on practice and using skills such as observation and reasoning this would make a practitioner work responsibly and ethically. Dewey's approach was child centered which emphasizes learning on the needs and interests of the child this approach is being used in early years today.

Schon (1976) Schon acknowledged a practitioner's training, experience and showed his appreciation for the practitioner this he named Knowing in action. This model acknowledges the tacit knowledge of the practitioner and can be empowering. He also believed in reflection on action (after the event and reflection in action (as it happens) He invented the phrase professional artistry, to use knowledge and skills to become reflective on practice. His reflective model draws on an emotional response believed to be thoughtful and able to draw on intuition and insight,

Schon's model of reflection in action helps a practitioner nurture what they already have achieved this can be flexible with time and used during or after the event. The on-action model helps develop stronger thinking and there is more time to reflect afterwards on how you could change or do things differently.

The most popular reflective models are Kolb (1984) experimental cycle and Gibbs (1988) Reflective cycle. Kolb's experimental cycle has four areas of reflection and he believed that the learning cycle is only effective when a practitioner has completed the whole cycle from start to finish and not cutting out any parts of the cycle. The four stages are Learning- to experience, Reflect-to conceptualise, Plan-and continuing the cycle

Gibbs is seen to be the most useful, as it allows you to progress quickly from what has happened to change any future actions. There are six parts of Gibbs reflective cycle which also includes a section on feelings. Both Kolb's and Gibbs reflective models show how observation and reflection on practice can enable a practitioner to have a new way of thinking to make changes. Gibbs

There are many ways you can reflect as an early year's practitioner. Reflection should be continual and ongoing. Through interacting with and listening to children in setting, staff meetings, appraisals, providing feedback to parents and liaising with other professionals in training or conferences and when staff training and team building session, discussing a child. Reflection can come in the form of reflection account forms keeping a diary, evaluating planning and provision. According to Very well mind (2020), group reflection is a fantastic way to air problems within a setting and find solutions to improve that everyone can agree on. Working together as a group to reflect on can identify individual strengths and weaknesses but you also may have to challenge what you agree and disagree with. Policies and procedures of the setting must be reflected on to ensure they still serve a purpose. Throughout the Early years Foundation phase reflection is mentioned for Practitioners to continually reflect on practice and provision to ensure that the children's needs are met. When working for flying start in the early years training is offered regularly to reflect with other early years settings and remind practitioners how important it is to be a practitioner and the positive effect, they have on so many children's lives. It also gives the opportunity to learn new qualities to update the provision they provide to ensure it remains high quality. There is also importance in the early years for practitioners to be reflective with integrated working with others which requires a reflective clear but sensitive approach and working in partnership with others is of vital importance for the welfare and outcomes of children and their families.

Relationships are important with children. Children learn best when they are relaxed and happy and so it is important to establish a good relationship with a child show an interest in what they are doing and what makes them happy. Parent or carer feedback can be part of the reflective process discussing with them what they feel went well and beneficial to the child. The environment needs to be inviting so it is important for a practitioner to reflect on the environment and how the children engage in space or make changes if it is not being enjoyed. It is also important to ensure your provision is inclusive to all a practitioner must provide provision that reflects equality and is accessible to children with ALN

Conclusion

Working within the early years has a huge responsibility and we are shaping children for the future. As a practitioner there is a duty to protect children and give them the best opportunities to have a safe and fulfilling life. Professional development is a vital part of critical reflection and developing ourselves professionally and personally can only have a positive impact on our wellbeing and job roles. Becoming a reflective practitioner allows a professional to continuously think over practice, challenging beliefs, improving knowledge and experience helps us keep us updated with what is going on within the early years.

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