

The Importance of Reflective Practice as a Professional Practitioner

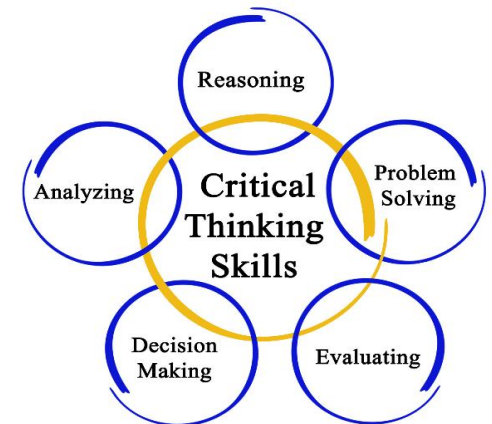
What is Reflective Practice?

By definition reflective practice is the cycle of learning through experiences and gain an insight of themselves or practice (Boud et al 1985). Reflective practice is a vital skill which is key for practitioners to possess. Once practitioners have accomplished the skill on reflecting on own work they are constantly updating their practice and ensuring they are delivering the best care and curriculum they can. Reflective practice is the skill of looking at a situation that took place and being honest with themselves to reflect on it individually or with colleagues then being able to discuss and improve practice. Being able to effectively reflect on own practice can help identify what can be changed to better their own professional knowledge. Some people believe that reflection is only used to identify the negatives, but it can also be used to find the positive that worked during a situation to continue using those positive skills. There are two types of reflective practice, reflection on practice and reflecting in practice. Reflection on practice is reflecting after the situation has happened to then improve it the next time and reflecting in practice is to reflect during the situation and continuously reflecting throughout the activity. According to Hargreaves and Page (2013) reflective practice is something you can learn, develop, and improve as well as a personal way of being and learning style. Reflective practice is not a skill people are born with but something that needs to be developed. It is a practitioner's personal engagement with reflective thinking, learning and action includes self-aware, creative, and critical thinking informed by evidence (Reed and Canning 2012). It is vital that all practitioners are actively reflecting on their work to ensure best practice. Perez (2019) identifies that the idea of 'professionalism' is underpinned by values which guide the skills, knowledge and ethical standards required to execute a job role. Reflective practice is a skill that can be used in all areas of the professional practice. There is no correct or incorrect way to reflect. Reflection is a personal development and there are numerous ways to carry it out depending on circumstance or preferences. Practitioners who carry out reflection in practice risk missing an aspect of the experience which could lead to opportunities to evaluate on to improve their future planning and knowledge, the preferred method of reflection is reflecting on practice. Reflecting on practice allows practitioners to reflect on the activity after it has finished

Reflective Practice within the Early Years Setting

Reflection is a key element while working in the Early Years Setting. It plays a significant role in effectively developing practitioner's practice. Reflection can be to identify positives and weakness within your own practice and further develop practitioner's work. Tarrant (2013) suggests that practitioners should carry out reflection in pairs, groups as well as solo self-reflection. By reflecting with peers, practitioners can support each other to improve practice as well as creating a setting that promotes reflection. In the workplace it is also good practice to have a colleague observe a session to then reflect on it together, this can benefit all staff as it promotes practitioners to work together to develop professional relationships. By reflecting with others, we can develop our skills to problem solve, giving constructive feedback, receiving it, and reasoning skills (Hallet 2013). Reflective practice is an element of a practitioner's professional identity. Other elements are being accepted by peers, feeling valued and belonging in the workplaces. McGillivray (2008) emphasises that aspects such as traditional beliefs, training, and qualifications all factor to the 'professional identity'. It is important to not let practitioners outside beliefs influence their work in the setting. The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) plays a large role in the delivery of care in Early Years Setting. The UNCRC is a complete set of 54 articles which every child under the age of 18 have the right to grow up in peace, tolerance, freedom, dignity, equality and solidarity (Together Scotland, 2022). The UNCRC helps create spaces where children feel safe and included no matter their history. All planning in Early Years settings should be centred around the UNCRC and reflection helps practitioners to identify areas they can improve to implement these rights and enable children to know what their rights are and have access to them.

Having effective communication is vital to reflect on own practice as well as engage with co-workers and parents on activities. Having effective communication is also useful when communicating with parents about their child's day, development, and behaviours, whether positive or negative within the setting. Creating a bond with parents allows you to have those conversations with parents which sometimes could cause conflict. Ideally, practitioners will be able to share their knowledge with parents to help them to reflect on situations at home and be able to give an insight to practitioners to help develop a plan that can support the child's needs (Paige-Smith and Craft 2011).



Literacy Pathways (2020).

Theories of Reflection

There are so many models of reflection which are quite different but have similar aspects and some may be more similar than others. Kolb's learning model was created in 1984 and can be used as a guide to help when reflecting. Even though it is a small reflective cycle including four stages and it is highly effective which focuses on understanding the development of the reflective cycle.

The four stages are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. It is important to start with the experience and the feeling it gave whether it be a new or old experience. Practitioners would then reflect on it and note anything that worked well, or they would like to change next time. Once the practitioner has reflected on the experience and assessed what they wanted to change or keep the same and complete the task again to show what they had learnt as part of the reflection during practice (University of Cambridge, 2021).

Another reflective model is the Gibbs Reflective Cycle, and it is an incredibly famous model that professionals use. Graham Gibbs created the six-stage model in 1988. Gibbs originally created it to be used when reflecting on a repeated experience although it can be used on a single event. The six stages are description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. By using these six stages it leads practitioners through the cycle and be able to effectively evaluate the experience.

There are various other theories of reflection which can benefit others and can be used as a useful guide as somewhere to start if feeling lost on where to begin when reflecting. Reflection is a skill that practitioners will develop as they progress as a professional. Practitioners do not have to just use one model of reflection; some models may suit different situations better.

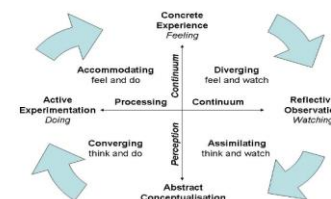
There are positives and negatives when using reflection models. One positive is the reflection models it gives practitioners the structure to use that is helpful to professionals who are new to reflecting and unsure where to start. Reflection models can guide practitioners through the reflecting process to evaluate all aspects of a situation. However, there are some negatives to using these models. The models suggest there is a set number of steps to complete reflection correctly and that is not the case. Once practitioners are confident in reflecting on their own work, they can adapt their way of reflecting to suit their everyday practice. Reflecting on work is a continual process and professionals can work off reflection that they have already processed instead of repeating the reflection model again. Some settings use reflection paperwork they ask practitioners to complete to evidence they are reflecting in their everyday practice. These forms can be helpful to practitioners as they can follow the steps and make notes of details of the situation they are reflecting on. Reflection forms are normally quite brief and allows practitioners to make their own anecdotes to create their own method of reflection. Practitioners can record their methods and what went well, what did not go well and methods they would like to try in the future, these forms are also useful to keep in practitioner's professional files to look back later and monitor their own reflection.

Reflection within the Professional Practice

Reflecting is a cycle which enables practitioners to gain insight into their practice by critically analysing about all aspects of it. This can help develop their lesson plans and applied to future experiences to further their knowledge as well as support the children in their care. Continuously reflecting on practice is especially important to develop and improve professionalism. By completing reflection regularly practitioners can enhance their knowledge through their own experiences. It is the responsibility of practitioners to ensure that the level of care and learning opportunities are of the highest level for the children. Practitioners become more aware, can recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and are in control by having a reflective approach. For effective reflection to take place then professionals need to relate it to their own work (Brock, 2014).

Through reflection, practitioners learn to pay attention to themselves in practice and be mindful of how they can improve during an experience and identify areas they need to improve on. They also become aware of their thoughts, emotions, and response to situations. The more that practitioners practice reflection the more that it will become a natural thought during their everyday practice which in turn improves their profession. Chalke (2013) suggests the importance of value knowledge over skills the benefit of mind over physical work.

As well as reflection helping to develop practitioners' profession it also benefits the children to ensure they are learning and engaging in the highest level of delivery of planning. By observing children during activities, it allows practitioners to evaluate play and the curriculum and make note of changes that need to be made to further children's development.



Kolb's Learning Model (No Date).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is vital for all practitioners to reflect on their work in order to develop their professional journey. All practitioners need to start somewhere as reflecting is a skill that needs to be learnt and is developed during repeating reflection. Not all practitioners reflect in the same way and there are so many ways of reflecting what works for some may not work for others, so it is about finding your reflective style and developing own confidence to be able to reflect effectively. Reflection is carried out to further knowledge and aid professional development. Reflection can also be used to get a better understanding of children, their development, needs and preferences. Practitioners should experiment with different reflective models to find their style of reflection and remember to adapt it to situations where needed.

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