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Exploring the importance of reflective practice in early years education and care.

What is reflection and reflective practice?

All humans and professionals can reflect. Reflection is a reviewing process for all. The process of reflection allows the individual to look back on an event or a situation and give themselves insight to develop improvements for future situations. When a person is reflecting it is essential to understand that while revisiting a specific situation or a completed task they analytically reflect and access to explore different perspectives. When a person is reflecting it is important to think of the positive outcomes from the situation and not just the negatives.

Reflective practice allows the person to gain insight and learn through their experiences allowing the person to become more aware and explore different perspectives improving the quality of care and education.

Why is reflective practice important to EY practice?

The importance of reflective practice within an early year's setting is crucial to working out what was right. Brock says that whilst in the process of reflection it will enable the professional to understand and empathise which can then help make a difference to improve the outcome of collaboration with children and their families.

Professionals use theory and new information to support their reflection and then through collaboration they can facilitate and support each other throughout their continued professional development. According to Slice (2018), after carrying out research she believes that professionals that reflect are more likely to challenge and change ineffective practice, this can then improve practices and professional's ways of doing and thinking for better outcomes. Stonehouse (2016) believes that through applying the early years planning cycle it can increase an early year's professional's awareness and inequities and support them to uphold the rights of our children, helping them become better learners. Stonehouse says that the process can either guide or challenge improvements within the sector creating a culture of honesty. Reflecting can support intentional practice which is thoughtful and purposeful, increasing both the practitioner's and learner's skills and understanding. Liz Suda program co-ordinator of humanities education at Melbourne Museum says the advice she would give to professionals would be to leave their ego at the door and be open to constructive criticism. She believes early years and other professionals should be open to improving their practice through continued professional development. Dewey (1933) believed that from doing reflection it becomes a purposeful action in which professional practitioners can learn from.

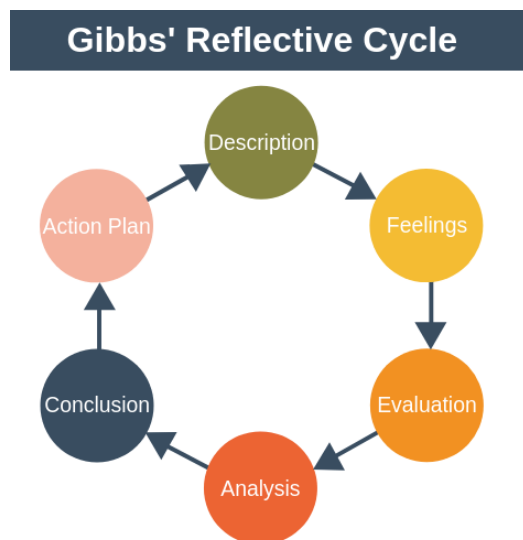
The theory of reflective practice.

There are various theories of reflection whether they be implemented through professional development for reflective practice or for everyday life reflection. Graham Gibbs developed his theory of the reflective cycle in 1988. Gibbs believed that through his reflective cycle framework it would allow the person reflecting on an experience to learn and plan from things that went well or did not go so well. Gibbs Cycle covers 6 stages. The six stages include description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and an action plan.

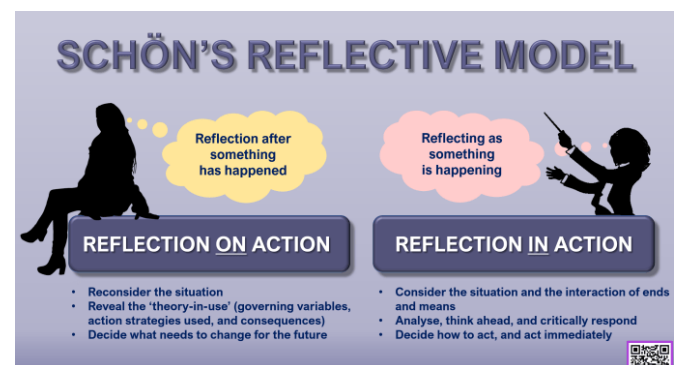
The theory of reflective practice.

Donald Schön's developed his reflective model theory in 1991. Schön wanted his model to provide an additional element to it that is not found in another reflective theory, this is where the person could reflect in action meaning to reflect as something is happening to be able to act immediately and then on action meaning to reflect after a situation has already happened. As a part of Shon's theory, he also developed the stage of knowing in action. Knowing in action Schön believed that this is a practitioner's ability to be able to carry out a task without too much thought for example, A doctor or a chef would wash their hands various amount of times throughout the day without cognitive effort. Another example would be an early year's practitioner who regularly see's the children off to their parents would know if someone new had came to collect a child.

Graham Gibbs, 1988 Reflective Model Theory



Donald Schön, 1991 Reflective Model Theory



In the final analysis of both Gibbs and Schön's reflective cycle theories it is clear that both models support reflective practice. Gibbs theory is a more structured cycle and allows the practitioner to go through six cycle stages and dig deeper for continuous professional improvement where as Schön's model focuses more on reflecting in real time as well as knowing in action to then being able to go away and post reflect for professional growth. Tan (2020) argues that Schön's reflective model has two main weaknesses, these being the reflective practice is the presupposition of self-protected individualism and an insufficient attention to ethical concerns. The model is similar in a way to Gibbs as they are both are easy to follow and well structured. According to Dr Fallin he suggests that Gibbs cycle could lead to superficial reflections leaving no room to challenge values or assumptions. This would then indicate a risk of bias and prejudice. Dr Fallin also says that with being unable to link the experience being reflected upon it can leave a missed opportunity to demonstrate depth. Whilst practitioners continually and carefully reflect upon their practice they are able to establish a responsible and ethical approach.