

The importance of reflective practice as a professional practitioner

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What is reflection and reflective practice?

According to the University Of Edinburgh (2013) the process of self-exploration and self-examination known as reflection involves assessing our viewpoints, qualities, experiences, and behaviours. It enables us to obtain understanding and determine how to proceed. The University of Cambridge (no date) implies that the act of reflecting on our experiences in order to gain knowledge from them for the future is known as reflective practice. Each of us can engage in activities to reflect on our experiences, draw lessons from them, and create a plan of action for what we will do next. Additionally, in order to learn from actual life events, reflective practice was established in professions including teaching, health, and social work. People in these professions would reflect on their interactions with their pupils, patients, or clients, how they went, and what lessons they could learn from them (University of Cambridge, no date). According to Iriss (2017) Donald Schon distinguished two sorts of reflection, reflection in action and reflection on action. Reflection-in-action, often known as 'thinking on our feet,' is a practice that allows professionals to modify the situation or activity on which they are working while it is occurring. Reflection-on-action is the process of thinking back on an experience, circumstance, or phenomena after it has already happened. When professionals reflect on action, they consider what transpired in that specific circumstance, why they acted as they did and whether they might have acted differently (Iriss, 2017). Furthermore, Rowlatt (2016) Emphasises that reflective practice is an effective way to uphold and continuously enhance the quality of your practice. Reflective practice is the process of considering and evaluating your own practice with the intention of adjusting, developing, and enhancing it. This process of reflection and development should be ongoing. Equally, Rowlatt (2016) maintains that the children in a setting, as well as their parents and carers, will benefit from reflection, which is an essential component of practice. The benefits to practitioners will be both personal and professional, where reflective practice will help them to sustain and continually develop. As a result practitioners will improve outcomes for children through reflection and ongoing development (Rowlatt, 2016).

Why is reflective practice important within the early years?

Gunning (2022) states that it is crucial to reflect on our performance as a means of growing and developing personally. This means that when we receive insight through our reflections, we can improve as practitioners. Although according to Paige-Smith and Craft (2010) there are many possibilities to share viewpoints on the same activity and to compare interpretations in early years settings where practitioners are increasingly working alongside one another. Gilleeney (2021) suggests that practitioners can get a critical understanding of their own practice through reflective practice. This will assist professionals in acquiring the methods, approaches, and abilities required to ensure that children make the best possible progress in their learning and development. Additionally, you'll be more proactive, have more confidence as a practitioner, and provide better care and education. Furthermore, Rowlatt (2016) highlights that you can improve outcomes for children by reflecting on your actions and making constant improvements. Parents and carers will gain from the process as well, since they will be able to observe changes in your practice and gain confidence in the high level and ongoing improvement of the care you are offering (Rowlatt, 2016). According to Paige-Smith and Craft (2010), reflective practice can give us accurate feedback on how to improve our practises, but it is crucial that we really develop our reflection so that it is shared and so that it enables us to challenge presumptions that we might otherwise take for granted. When we reflect on our practice, we should be able to see it from the perspective of others. However, it goes beyond only observing and reflecting on our practice. It involves examining both our feelings and our understanding of it (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2010).

How reflective practice can improve quality in early years

According to Rowlatt (2016) reflective practice frequently encounters obstacles. This can include lacking the time or not knowing how to go about putting reflective practice into practice. Finding the tools that work best for you is just as important as taking the time to reflect. However, Soni and Presswood (2018) maintains that reflective practice strives to have a good impact on both parents, who are comforted that the quality of the provision is excellent, as well as on children by making sure their unique requirements are satisfied. Additionally, practitioners gain by increasing their self-assurance in their skills, which raises drive and job happiness. However, while improving areas that require improvement is obviously necessary, it is also beneficial to take into account a person's or a setting's strengths (Soni and Presswood, 2018). Also, Rowlatt (2016) implies that a set of tools and instructions known as a quality improvement tool can help you evaluate your current procedures and make changes that will enhance the results for the children in your care and their families. The process of reviewing and improving your practice should be quality improvement. Peer observations, which are connected to several techniques for quality improvement, are an excellent way to consider both your own practice and that of others. Peer observations should be concise and short, and the observer should offer helpful criticism with the goal of identifying strengths and potential improvement areas in the context. You may enhance outcomes for children by reflecting on your actions and making constant improvements. Consider some additional advantages for them that could result from this. Their unique needs are satisfied, their self-esteem is raised, and they are in an atmosphere that is suitable, enabling, and engaging with opportunities both inside and outside (Rowlatt, 2016). Additionally, reflecting on your practice regularly will help you to develop your skills and boost your confidence and drive. Assist you in concentrating on and taking charge of your practice. Determine your areas of professional needs and assist you in establishing goals. Furthermore, speaking with others can be a very effective reflection tool since you can discuss your practice, exchange ideas, and offer encouragement to one another. You will receive assistance from new ideas to expand your practice when you have positive relationships with other professionals and reflect together (Rowlatt, 2016).

Reflective models and theories

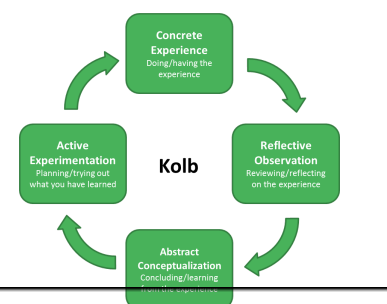
According to the University of Cambridge (no date) there are numerous models available to help guide your reflection. Although each model has a slightly different strategy, they all cover the same stages. The key distinction is the number of steps and degree of detail each developer opted to provide. Depending on their personal interests, individuals will be drawn to various models. The University of Edinburgh (2020) maintains that one of the most well-known cycles for reflection leads you through six stages and is called the Gibbs' Reflective cycle. Graham Gibbs created the Gibbs Reflective Cycle in 1988 to organise learning from events. It includes the following six stages: Description. Here, you have the ability to go into great depth about the circumstance. Feelings. Here, you can examine any emotions or ideas you may have had while having the experience and how they might have affected it. Evaluation. Here, you get the ability to assess what did and didn't work in the circumstance. Analysis. You get a chance to make sense of what transpired during the analysis stage. Conclusion. You can draw conclusions about what transpired in this part. Lastly, action plan. This stage involves making plans for what you would do differently in a related or comparable circumstance in the future (University of Edinburgh, 2020). Additionally The University of Cambridge (no date) states that another approach to use is Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Based on beliefs about how people learn, Kolb's model (1984) has four essential stages and is focused on the idea of understanding being developed through practical experiences. The four stages are active experimentation, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and concrete experience. According to the model, every experience begins with something that is either familiar to us or completely novel to us. In the following phase, we must think about the event and make a note of anything new about it. As a result, we begin to generate fresh thoughts. For instance, when something unexpected occurs, we attempt to determine why. In the last phase, we put our fresh insights to use in various contexts. This illustrates how our experiences and reflections have a direct impact on our learning. This model is comparable to the one used by young infants to understand fundamental concepts like hot and cold. They might touch something hot, get burned, and become more wary about touching anything that might later do them harm (University of Cambridge, no date).



Furthermore the Cambridge Assessment (no date) implies that the work of Donald Schön offers another method of reflection. The distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action was made by Schön in 1991. Reflection-in-action is reflection carried out while "doing." That is, thinking back on the event while it still has the potential to teach us anything. Instead of thinking about how you might do things differently in the future, this is done during the lesson. This is a very effective technique for reflection because it enables you to respond to and alter an event as it occurs. On the other hand, reflection-on-action entails considering how practice might be improved after the lesson has been presented. Schön understands the value of looking back to see how our knowledge-in-action may have influenced an unanticipated result. Reflection-on-action is the process of considering how your prior learning may have influenced the experience you experienced after the event (Cambridge assessment, no date). Additionally the University of Cambridge (no date) maintains that although they can be a fantastic method to begin thinking about reflection, keep in mind that every model has disadvantages. A summary of the advantages are that the models provide a framework to be followed, serve as a helpful starting off point for individuals unsure of where to start, and enable you to evaluate a scenario on all levels (University of Cambridge, no date).

How reflective practice can support you to develop as a professional

Rowlatt (2016) highlights that you must be able to view your practice objectively in order to be a reflective practitioner. You must be able to appreciate your successes while also acknowledging areas that could be improved. You can discover your professional development requirements and, over time, build your practice's confidence by evaluating your performance. However, you might wish to think about keeping a journal for reflection. Various personal developments, thoughts, experiences, feelings, and reflections might be captured in this. On the other hand reflective practice can benefit greatly from considering the viewpoints of others that utilise your setting. You will comprehend them better if you think about how parents, carers, children, and other professionals feel (Rowlatt, 2016). Gilleeney (2021) implies that to be consistent and to enhance the learning environment, practitioners evaluate everything they do in practice. Additionally Lindon and Trodd (2016) suggests that early childhood educators that genuinely care about young children are open to receiving criticism and thinking about the obstacles to greater practice. According to the Health and care professions council (2021) reflection enables you to recognise and value positive experiences and more clearly pinpoint ways to enhance your practise and service delivery. Additionally, it might be helpful for processing and learning from more difficult events. On the other hand, Lindon and Trodd (2016) implies that early childhood educators that genuinely care about young children are open to receiving criticism and thinking about the obstacles to greater practice. The University of Cambridge (no date) suggests that some of these issues, particularly the one with the lack of time, cannot be solved easily. The greatest strategy is to reflect frequently and briefly. You'll be amazed at what you can accomplish in just a few minutes per day. As you gain experience, you'll discover that you can concentrate on your reflection for longer and start to earn bigger rewards (University of Cambridge, no date).



Cambridge assessment (no date)

REFLECTION IN ACTION

Reflecting as something happens

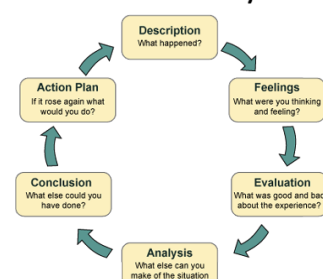
- Consider the situation
- Decide how to act
- Act immediately

REFLECTION ON ACTION

Reflecting after something happens

- Reconsider the situation
- Think about what needs changing for the future

Gibbs Reflective Cycle



Ivory Research (2023)

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