

The significance of reflective practice within the early years' workforce

Introduction

This briefing paper discusses the importance of reflective practice to facilitate professional development in the early years workforce. It provides an overview of the important aspects of reflection along with theoretical frameworks and models by influential thinkers such as Schön and Driscoll.

What is reflective/professional practice?

As described by PACEY (2016) reflective practice in the early years is the process of recognising and utilising effective practice with the focus to challenge and improve upon existing skills. In addition to this, PACEY (2016) explains how a reflective practitioner can demonstrate an awareness of their professional development needs by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore PACEY (2016) suggests that reflective practitioners think about the way they work and how it can impact the children and families in their care and practitioners can consider different ways of working to develop and improve their practice in future. Similarly, Lindon and Trodd (2016) explain that reflective practice allows practitioners to collaborate with everyone and explore concepts in greater depth to achieve better practice. Additionally, Lindon and Trodd state that practitioners at the beginning of their working life will require significant support from colleagues in order to gain valuable skills and knowledge as they progress. According to Hallet (2013) The early years structure is ever evolving due to government led policies influencing pedagogy and practice and so being able to look back and reflect on previous practice allows new ideas to form and to demonstrate progression in practice. In addition to this, Hallet (2013) states that work based reflective learning, teaching and assessment pedagogy enables practitioners to enhance professional development from within a setting.

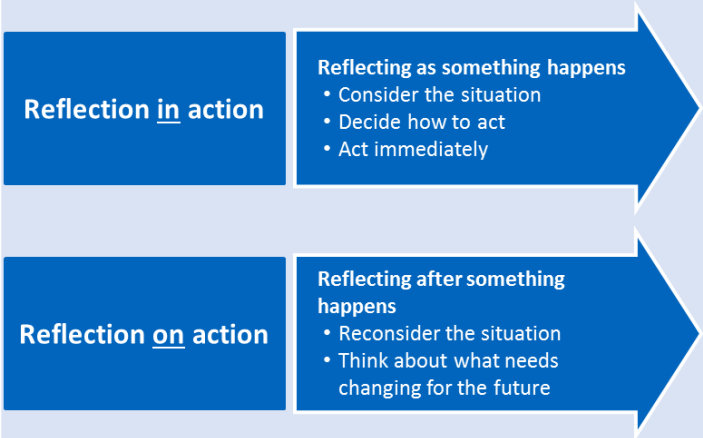
Why is Reflective practice important?

According to Gunning (2022) Reflective practice is an important tool that enables practitioners to self-improve and develop when reflecting on their pedagogy. Gunning (2022) states that some practitioners may find it useful to journal their reflection to document and answer questions such as: What does your practice look like at your best? What helps you to learn best? What would it be like to be taught by you? and lastly, what is distinctive about your practice? In addition to this, as suggested by PACEY (2016) reflection will benefit children, parents and carers in settings, as it is important for practitioners to collaborate with others. Additionally, this will also benefit the practitioner by helping to support their personal and professional development, through reflection and continual improvement, practitioners will achieve successful outcomes for children; an example of this could be met by providing an appropriate interactive environment, that enables children to grow, including suitable resources for them and opportunities to develop indoors and out, their individual needs are met, resulting in their self-esteem increasing. According to Hallet (2013) the purpose of reflective practice is to provide children and families with better quality experiences as engaging in reflection it allows practitioners the opportunity to improve provision and practice through informed decisions on whether their work with children is effective.

Theories and models

What is a model of reflection?

A model of reflection as described by the University of Nottingham (no date) is a structured process to guide practitioners through the practice of effective reflection. There are two main models that are being focused on:



Cambridge University (no date)

Schön's Theory of reflective practice

As stated by Lishman (2015) Reflective practice emerges principally from the work of Schon (1983 & 1987) For example, Lishman (2015) explains that Schon's thinking reflective practice was a way of reducing the gap, by discovering the actual theory that is embedded in what professionals do, rather than what they say they do. In this sense, reflective practice is essentially a way of improving practice. Schon (1983 &1987) emphasised the importance of acknowledging that professional knowledge involves both technical rationality (rules) and professional artistry (reflection in action). In addition to this, the university of hull (2022) suggest that Schon (1991) theory of reflection in action/reflection on action provides an additional element by making a distinction between reflection during the event and reflection after the event. Reflection in action as described by The University of Hull (2022) is the experience itself, as it happens, thinking about it during the event, deciding how to act at the time and acting immediately. Whereas reflection on action is when practitioners reflect on something that has happened and what they would do differently if it was to happen again. Furthermore, The University of Hull (no date) explain that when new information is gained, or theoretical perspectives studied inform experience and help process feelings and actions. According to Hebert (2015) Schon (1983) explored the view that professionalism consists of rigorous problem solving through scientific theory and technique.

Driscoll's model of reflection

Cambridge University (no date) discuss another model of reflection, developed by Driscoll (mid-1990s) this model was based on the three what's: What? So what? And now what? Cambridge University (no date) suggests that this model was made to promote the learning experience and reflect on what was learnt.

Driscoll (mid-1990s) said to set a situation or experience into context, practitioners should first describe what the situation or experience was. Practitioners should then reflect on their experiences by asking the "so what" question and then considering what they have learnt as a result of the experience. Once considered, practitioners should then finally think about the action they should take as a result of their reflection. Driscoll (mid 1990s) went on to suggest that there may not be any changes as a result of the practitioner's reflection, if they feel they are doing everything they should.

How can reflective practice improve quality in the early years?

Koshy et al (2017) It allows you to recognise your own strengths and weaknesses, and use this to guide on going learning, by reflection you will develop your skills in self-directed learning, improve motivation and improve the quality of care you are able to provide.

Mathew, Mathew and Peechattu (2017) Reflective practice is a process that facilitates teaching, learning and understanding, and it plays a central role in teachers' professional development. Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on an action, to engage in a process of continuous learning. Reflective practice is an important tool in a practice based professional learning settings, where people learn from their own professional learning experiences, rather than from formal learning or knowledge transfer. It is the most important source of personal professional development and improvement. It is also an important way to bring together theory and practice; through reflection, a person can see and label forms of thought and theory within the context of their work. According to Lindon and Trodd (2016) all practitioners are expected to collaborate with children and families to reflect on what they do within a setting as reflective practice is crucial to create and maintain an active, self-sustained and capable early years practice. Additionally, Lindon and Trodd (2016) explain that early years practitioners are encouraged to support and actively encourage young children to enable them to develop their own communication and thinking skills. Furthermore, Lindon and Trodd (2016) highlight that is difficult for practitioners to support children if their own skills are poorly developed.

How can reflective practice support professionals' development?

HCPC (no date) In order to gain insights about their practice, individuals should consider their experiences from reflecting on their thought process.

When professionals are proactively and regularly engaging in the practice of reflection, it becomes a meaningful exercise. Similarly, Birth to five matters (no date) expresses that reflective practice provides practitioners with the confidence to develop necessary skills to improve the development of children within their setting. In addition to this, children benefit from reflective practice as they are far more likely to achieve successful outcomes, giving them higher aspirations. In addition to this, According to Hallet (2013) practitioners demonstrating a commitment to self-improvement is an example of being professional within the early years workforce. Furthermore, Hallet (2013) suggests that reflecting with children encourages them to reflectively learn about the environment they are in as well as their own learning. According to Thompson and Thompson (2023) people within the education sector are being encouraged to reflect as it is now being recognised as a foundation to the development of professional practice. Thompson and Thompson (2023) suggest that once individuals understand the effectiveness of reflection and how it can be implemented into their work, they develop a strong commitment to making reflective practice a reality. According to Thompson and Thompson (2023) reflection is more than just stopping for thought as learning and practice will not take place if holistic connections are not formed between the thinking and the doing.

In conclusion, As stated by Finlayson (2015) Reflective practice is a personal interpretation of an individual's choice to follow a reflective practice model. Reflection allows practitioners to consider new ideas and collaborate with others to acknowledge and understand children's needs to provide them with care, suitable resources and an effective pedagogy. Demonstrating an effective practice of reflection not only allows practitioners to develop but it also supports the growth and development of the children within their setting. Reflective practice is the process of analysing strengths and weaknesses within a practitioner's profession. This allows practitioners to develop new skills whilst honing the skills they already have. This demonstrates progression in practice. Reflective practice is important because it allows practitioners to discover what worked well within their practice and what needs improvement and what is needed in order to utilize a successful pedagogy. Models of reflection allow practitioners to demonstrate an effective approach, Hebert (2015) Schon (1983) explored the view that professionalism consists of rigorous problem solving through scientific theory and technique. Driscoll (mid 1990's) said that practitioners should reflect on their own experience, then act on this reflection, even if this action doesn't change the outcome, as long as they are working towards the right end goal. Reflective practice allows practitioners to set an example of how to communicate and improve on previously learned topics. This creates a growth mindset within the early years, meaning children are more likely to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Reflective practice supports professional development, as it allows practitioners to collaborate communicate and develop their pedagogies. This in turn, allows children the opportunity to discuss with peers, engaging in thoughtful and insightful interactions. According to Thompson and Thompson (2023) people within the education sector are being encouraged to reflect as it is now being recognised as a foundation to the development of professional practice. Overall, the practice of reflection should be continuously implemented throughout all of children's and professionals learning, as it encourages the individual to look at their abilities and focus on developing their skills whilst being mindful and considerate of any aspects that may need improvement.

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