

The importance of reflective practice for early years practitioners as a means to Maintaining quality services for young children. May 29th, 2019.

What is Reflection?

As practitioners we frequently take time to think about things that have happened throughout our working day. We think about how we could have done things differently or how we could improve things the next time. This act of thinking is called, 'reflection'. Most of us do this without even realizing it! (Mint, 2017) Reflective practice is essentially thinking about what you do (skillsyouneed,2019)



Image: olliebray (2011)

Reflective cycles.

To help us become reflective, we can use reflective models/cycles. These are used as a guide for practitioners to understand and participate in reflective practice. (Nottingham university, 2009)

Below is one example of a reflective model which is designed for use within teaching. This model has 4 stages for practitioners to follow. It encourages users to step back and look at their practice, how they do things and why they do things to discover if their actions are effective.

Hall & Simeral reflective teaching cycle (2015)

Reflective Cycle

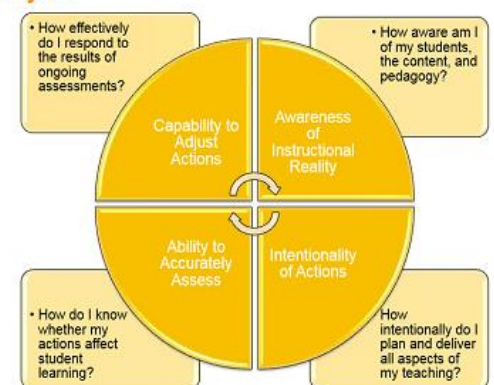


Image: Atkinson(2015)

This model pushes educators to not only look at the situation but also at the student. The cycle motivates practitioners to look deeper into their teaching style and how they deliver knowledge. Importance is also placed on the learning style of the student and educators are motivated to investigate if their teaching methods suit the pupil. This is where reflection comes into action, thinking about the event and acting appropriately to achieve a better outcome. (Hall and Simeral, 2015)

As educators, "we should stop and think about what we're doing, why we're doing it and how it's going" according to teach thought staff (2019) Ultimately, the reason we do this is to ensure that we deliver the best learning experience. Being able to reflect within the workplace enhances the care and provision that we deliver. (Northrop,2011) We also participate in reflection to improve our professional development. Practitioners that reflect, are active learners. They strive to continuously look at themselves and ask what they could do better. (Lindon, 2012) When we reflect, we increase our self-awareness, building on our emotional intelligence. It also gives us the skills to better understand others. (skillsyouneed, 2019)

Examining our practice can be essential on a child's development. Through reflecting on previous knowledge that we are aware the child may have, we can add onto that knowledge to enhance their learning experience. (Cavilla, 2017) This links to Vygotsky's scaffolding theory of building on previous knowledge. (zeske,2019) If we fail to engage in reflection, development and learning is hindered. (Tarrant,2013) Opportunities to improve and expand on our knowledge and experiences are diminished. We remain stagnant, never reaching our full potential and fail in bettering ourselves, our practice and our workplace. The children in our care will never receive the quality service they deserve. That is why reflective practice is essential to ensure high standards and quality provision in early years. (Bleach,2014)

According to CIPD, 2019,'Reflective practice can help re-visit and strengthen neuronal connections we need to develop new habits/skills/mindsets. Through developing a habit of self-reflective practice, we may find that we acquire:

- An increase in self-awareness
- An increase in emotional intelligence,
- An increase in the capacity for emotional regulation and
- the ability to inspire, influence and motivate others. (CIPD,2019)

Using reflective techniques can also strengthen our intuition. Giving us the ability to be able to make effective decisions quickly. (cartwright, 2011)

Within our educational settings we have standards that are expected to meet. One such regulatory body are Estyn (2018) and they list 3 attributes as pointers for delivery of an excellent school inspection:

1. very strong,
2. sustained performance and
3. practice.

Estyn (2017) informs us that, 'It takes hard work, strong leadership, clear vision and relentless commitment to achieve excellence.' These are guidelines and advisories that every educational setting should try to achieve. Are we delivering a quality service to the children in our care? Reflective practice can help practitioners to reach this goal. Time should be taken to look at ourselves and our workplace and think about whether our practice is meeting these aspirations. By implementing reflection, we can investigate what areas of learning could benefit from change. Implementing reflection in our practice shows that we are striving for the best we can be, for ourselves, the setting where we work and the children and young people in our care. Reflection helps us to progress, grow and develop. (Tarrant,2013)

In 2015 the Donaldson report was implemented into the curriculum. This report set out 4 areas that are essential for children and young people. These are targeted to help children become:

- ambitious, capable learners
- enterprising, creative contributors
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals.

Through reflective practice we, as practitioners, can help children to reach these outcomes. Reflecting on past experiences and implementing a change for the better can facilitate an enriched learning experience building successful futures. (Welsh gov.2016)

The purpose of this briefing paper was to provide information about reflective practice. Not everyone feels comfortable picking holes in their practice. It could be difficult for some practitioners to take a deep look and scrutinise themselves and how they work for the purpose of self-reflection. (Hallet,2013) Although, with all this new knowledge hopefully the benefits of reflection will prove beneficial to your workplace and practice.

Simiral and Hall (2017) inform us that the difference in what a child learns is the due to the impact of the teacher. we should make it commonplace to Continuously strive for excellence and use reflective practice as a tool to achieve this goal.

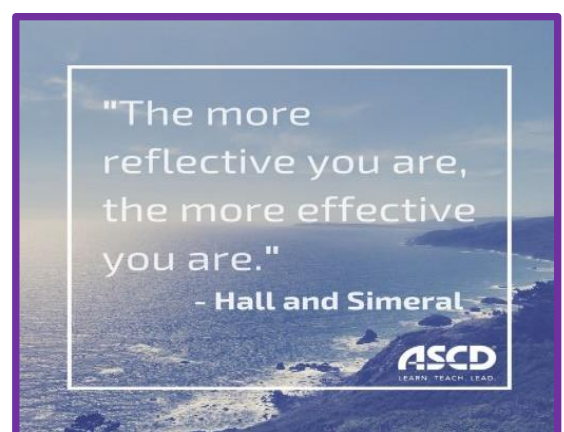


Image: DCSD (2019)

Element 2. Reflective log (word count:1091)

Brief description of the activity
The mathematical activity chosen involved a dice, white boards and whiteboard pens. The children wrote numbers one to six on their whiteboard, rolled the dice and recognised the number on the dice. The game concluded when the children had recognised, matched and crossed off the six numbers on their board.
Aim/Objective of the activity
The aims of this activity were to: 1. To count one to one correspondence 2. Identify numbers up to at least 6 3. Write numbers at least up to 6 4. Turn taking/sharing
Your role
My role within this activity was to lead and deliver the lesson to the reception class. I also supported the groups of children as I worked with them within their teaching groups of approximately 5 children. I worked on an individual basis supporting each of the 5 children within the lower ability group for them to gain the most out of the learning experience. I helped the children to identify numbers and gave support to those who needed help with writing number formations, underwriting or overwriting if needed. Some children struggled to count the individual dots on the dice, so I gave support to the children that needed help counting one to one correspondence. I also considered the emotional and social aspect of the children's development by ensuring that appropriate turn-taking and sharing took place. All children were also encouraged to help and learn from each other, facilitating in scaffold learning.
Positive aspects – why?
The activity proved to be a positive experience for the children in this year group. All children took part and interacted appropriately. They appeared to be having fun and enjoyed the game as it was one that they had not played before. The children viewed the activity as a game rather than work. I knew this as they asked if they could keep playing 'the game' or 'could they play the game later'. We had the morning session to be able to undertake this activity so plenty of time was available to ensure all children gained the most out of the lesson's objectives.

The lack of time constraint enabled myself to be able to reflect, 'in action' (Schon,1983) and adapt the activity as and when I felt a change was needed to accommodate learning styles and development. Small groups of approximately 5 children was also a positive aspect.

Challenging aspects – why?

Thought needed to be given to different learning styles, i.e. Vark and ark, visual, aural, read/write and kinesthetic, for each child to reach their potential. As well as the differentiation between the groups of children as there was a vast difference between the levels of mathematical understanding of the children in the cohort. Some were more able than others so found the task relatively easy to accomplish. Others struggled with the basic numeracy skills so needed more help. Also, one child has A.S.D so needed a different approach to be able to undertake the task.

What knowledge was demonstrated?

I imparted knowledge of mathematical concepts, i.e., counting, number recognition.in addition to, fine and gross motor skills, pencil grip and dice throwing.

What skills were demonstrated?

I demonstrated how to hold the pens correctly using the preferred finger grip to benefit the children's fine motor skills. In addition to this, I helped some children to build on their number formations skills.

I also exhibited and shared with the children informative and relevant mathematical knowledge required for this activity. I aided some children with their number recognition and counting skills as some children were unable to count one to one correspondence.

Which values were demonstrated?

Patience was demonstrated by myself to ensure that children were listened to and appreciated for their input into the activity. The children actively listened to the instructions given and I, in return, listened to their needs, exhibiting effective communication and a mutual respect by all.

Patience and empathy were shown by the children to each other in their turn-taking and interaction and it was also demonstrated as they supported each other to achieve different parts of the activity.

What could have been done differently? Why?

On reflection, there are numerous things that I could have done differently to ensure a more successful activity.

Firstly, I should have made sure that the resources were readily available before beginning the task.

Whilst undertaking the task, I reflected 'in action' as mentioned in Schon's (1983) reflective cycle and realised that there were some children that only recognised numbers 1 to 3. To accommodate those children, I quickly grabbed a few pieces of paper and Sellotape, and covered the numbers on the dice from 4 and above with the paper and wrote 1 to 3 on the paper. So that the children with limited recognition would only throw a number between 1 and 3. I didn't want them to fail each time they threw the dice, as it would have a knock on effect on their wellbeing and confidence and could result in the children losing interest, impacting on their learning.

Secondly, for the more able children, again, whilst undertaking the activity, I realised that some children recognized numbers over 10. I looked around the class and found another dice and introduced it into the game so those children could throw 2 dice at one time giving numbers up to 12.

Next time, I should have all these resources ready to use. Rather than make them as I went along.

I could have used number lines as a resource for the children needing help with recognising and writing the bigger numbers up to 12.

The child with A.S.D found this task difficult and visually showed signs of distress. After relaying this to the child's special needs teacher. I discovered that children with Autism can find games with an unexpected outcome difficult to understand as they do not like the uncertainty of what is 'maybe coming next' they like to know 'exactly what is happening'. Following this, advice was given for future lessons to support these types of situations. The use of a pre-activity chat, explaining what the game is about, demonstrating the numbers on the dice and possibly a social story of the game explaining from start to finish what happens so that the child would know the steps taken within the game. The child could also just observe the activity to understand what is happening and what happens within the activity. All of these are small measures to ensure the child is included in learning alongside their peers.

Element 4 Personal Development Plan

Area for further development	Why?	How?	Who/Where?	When?
1. Knowledge Social Worker	In the next step of my career progression I envisage myself as a social worker. Within this role I feel I will be able to use my previous workplace skills and life skills that I have gained to diligent professional social worker. As my career path to date has been working with children, I feel passionate about early years and believe that early intervention should be the primary objective in the safeguarding of children and their families. I will utilise my contacts within the council to gain valuable voluntary experience in the hope to achieve this goal.	I plan to do a masters (MSC) in social work,....the length of the course is two years full time study. To be able to enrol on this course I would need to achieve at least a 2:2 result in the B.a (hons) in Education and Care that I am currently studying.	The relevant course will be In Swansea university, on the singleton campus. The tuition fees are £7,200 per year. https://www.swansea.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/humanandhealthsciences/social-work/	I hope to embark on this course When I have completed my Ba hons in education and care.
2. Knowledge P.G.C.E. – Postgraduate Certificate in Education.	To use my previous experience as a Learning Support Officer and Ba(hons) in education and care to further my professional development. As a learning support officer for a number of years I have had the regular opportunity to plan and deliver lessons. I have also had the advantage of being involved with intervention and support groups.	To be able to enrol on this course I would need to gain a minimum of 2:2 result in the B.a (hons) Education and care that I am currently studying. The duration of the course is 1-year full time.	The P.G.C.E course will be in the Swansea SA1 campus. Tuition Fees: £9,000 1 year. https://digital.ucas.com/courses/details	The starting date for this course is the 7 th September 2020.
3. Skills Welsh	I firmly believe in Wales becoming a welsh speaking nation and I would like to build Welsh language skills to be able to facilitate the use of Welsh within the classroom and everyday life.	I would like to enrol on the, 'Foundation course 2/Syflaen 2' Course. The duration of the course is 30 weeks.	This course is available at Pencoed Campus, Bridgend College, Bridgend. The cost of this course is £90.00. https://www.learnwelsh.cymru	September 2019. Every Tuesday 19.00-21.00.

4. Skills Outdoor Learning/Forest School.	I feel like this area of skills would benefit my progression within Education and further my professional development.	I would like to enrol on the, 'Planning the Outdoor space in the Foundation Phase' course. This is a day course.	This course is offered by 'Collective Learning'. Location is at the future inns, Cardiff. https://www.collectivelearning.co.uk The cost of the course is £190+vat.	This course takes place in September 2019.
5. Values Supporting Transition.	I would like to build on my knowledge and skills within my professional role by learning how to support children going through new experiences, transitions or changes they may encounter. Gaining knowledge that will have a positive impact on a child's wellbeing.	I plan to enrol on the online course, 'Listening to children, supporting transition.'	This course is offered by 'the Open University.' The course is free. https://www.open.ac.uk	As this course is on-line, I can choose to start in August 2019.
6. Values Pupil Voice.	I plan to build on my professional development by understanding more about pupil voice and the importance of empowering children by giving them the opportunity to input into their learning and choices.	I would like to enrol on the, 'Achieving Excellent in the FP in an Estyn Inspection' Course. This is a day course.	This course is offered by 'Collective Learning'. Location is at the future inns, Cardiff. https://www.collectivelearning.co.uk The cost of this course is £190+vat.	This course takes place in September 2019.
7. Other? Wellbeing and Nurture.	I would like to gain more experience and up to date practice within the area of wellbeing and nurture.	I plan to enrol on the, 'Nurture for wellbeing' Course. This is a day course.	This course is offered by 'Collective Learning'. Location is at the future inns, Cardiff. https://www.collectivelearning.co.uk The cost of this course is £190+vat.	November 2019.

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