

Reflection in Practice

Introduction

Reflection: Is a part of everyday life.

'A Reflective Practitioner is the key to quality improvement as they help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of a setting's provision.' Linda Thornton and Pat Brunton (2010) Cited on www.teachingexpertise.com

Practitioners who can reflect on their day to day practices not only can help to improve the setting but help towards having strong professional approaches. Being reflective involves a number of skills and actions. This toolkit will help you to understand what skills are involved in being reflective, the processes which are involved and give you some examples of how to apply reflection to your daily practices.



Links with Statutory Duties / Policies and Procedures / EYFS Welfare and Safeguarding

Providers are encouraged within the Statutory Guidance to reflect on the policies and practices of the setting to ensure they are always providing a safe, healthy, stimulating and welcoming environment for all individual families and children.

Throughout the EYFS Statutory Guidance reflection is often mentioned. Practitioners are to ensure that they are reflecting on the children's learning and experiences to ensure the child's individual needs and interests are met. Practitioners must also reflect on observations and assessments to evaluate the needs and identify the next steps for the individual child.

The EYFS also mentions that practitioners should encourage children to reflect on their experiences and are encouraged to share their feelings with their key person or peers.

Ofsted standards also encourage settings and providers to undertake self-evaluation and to document this process by completing 'SEF' forms; this is a key way for a setting to reflect on their practices.



The Early Years Foundation Stage: Characteristics of Effective Learning

'The EYFS states that we need to 'Consider ways to support the child to strengthen and deepen their current learning and development.....'

The learning and development cycle from the EYFS development matters is a form of reflection done in the setting. You start the cycle by observing the child and listening to see what their interests are, you then look at the observations you have completed and assess what learning has taken place and what the child has enjoyed or disliked about the experience you observed, and finally you plan what you are going to do next to enhance the children's learning and what the next steps are going to be.

Engagement – Playing and Learning

Reflecting on children's interests and experiences to ensure you are offering a stimulating effective environment for all children individually.

Motivation – Active Learning

Reflecting on situations and how you could have improved the experience for the child to extend their learning.

Thinking – Creating and thinking critically

Providing opportunities and experiences for children to explore and develop their creativity, to problem solve and develop critical thinking and to enhance language through reflections on experiences.

The Early Years Foundation Stage: Areas of Learning and Development

Prime Areas

- Personal Social and Emotional Development: Provide experiences where children can reflect on their activities and experiences with one another and with adults and opportunities to express their feelings in an environment in which they feel comfortable.
- Physical Development: Reflect with children on their physical activities, challenges and achievements. Can they be involved in planning their next physical play activities?
- Communication and Language: Help extend children's reflect language, for example asking them questions on how they felt an activity went, what they liked or disliked about the activities or what they would like to see change in the activity if you were to do the activity again. Older children may be able to answer the question but younger children may use body language to express how they feel about certain experiences or may use simple words when you talk with them about their experiences.

Specific Areas

In all four specific areas it is important for providers to reflect on how experiences are provided for the children, and how the children are being encouraged to further develop their skills and achieve their goals through suitable challenges.

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

Effective practice

KEEP (2005) guidance cites SPEEL (Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning) and highlights that effective practitioners can evaluate and analyse and reflect their own practices

'KEEP – the key elements of effective practice

Effective practice in the early years requires committed, enthusiastic and reflective practitioners with a breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and understanding. Effective practitioners use their own learning to improve their work with young children and their families in ways which are sensitive, positive and Non-judgemental. Therefore through initial and on-going training and development, practitioners need to develop, demonstrate and continuously improve their:

- Understanding of the individual and diverse ways that children develop and learn
- Knowledge and understanding in order to actively support and extend children's learning in and across all learning in and across all areas and aspects of learning.
- Practice meeting all children's needs, learning styles and interests
- Work with parents, carers and the wider community
- Work with other professionals within and beyond the setting
- Relationships with both children and adults.

Page 5 of Keep Guidance document (website link below in 'Supporting Information and Resources' section for full guidance).

Links to the child's home learning environment

Practitioners have the duty to reflect on their policies and procedures for parent partnership and how they might improve their partnerships to ensure they are delivering high standards of communication and links between the child's home life and setting.

There are many opportunities to share information with parents about child development and 'how children learn' in order to support and enhance a child's home learning experiences and environment – indoors and outdoors, and when 'out and about'. Practitioner and shared whole team reflections and evaluation of this important element of practice should be regularly undertaken. The voice of parents in this reflective process is also an essential aspect of best practice.

What is Reflection?

Reflection can be structured or unstructured; it is an evaluative thought process; which may be written to document the process of reflecting on an experience or situation which has occurred. Reflection usually contains stages to review what went well, what didn't and what could be changed to ensure the situation is more effective or enable you to move forward in a situation. Reflection can be of both personal and professional experiences.

Reflection theories and models

Schon (1983) identifies two kinds of reflection:

Reflection - on action: This is where you will reflect after an event you have experienced and you start reflecting on how things could have been improved or how you will deal with a situation if it occurs again.

Reflection - in action: This is where you reflect on a situation as it occurs and 'think on your feet' with how you can improve the situation there and then!

There are many theories on reflection, but below there are a couple of reflection cycle samples for you to look at:

Gibbs (1988)

Experience - What happened?

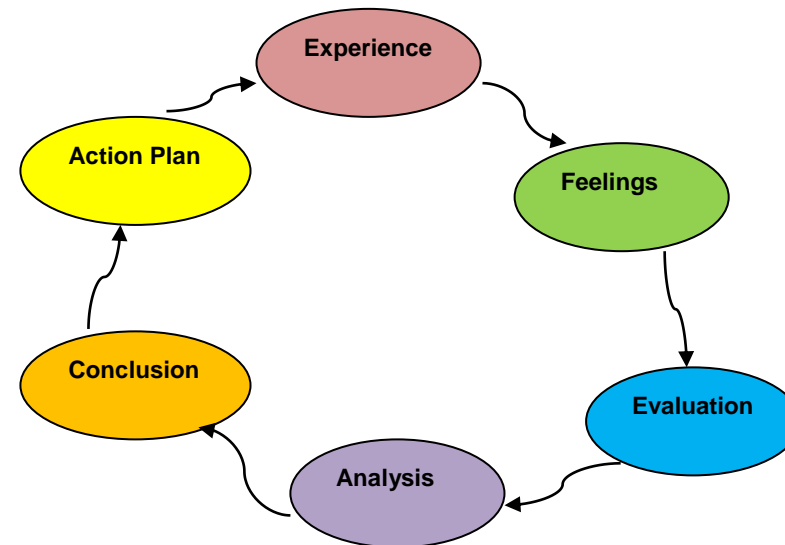
Feelings - What you were feeling?

Evaluation – What was good and bad about the situation?

Analysis – to make sense of the situation

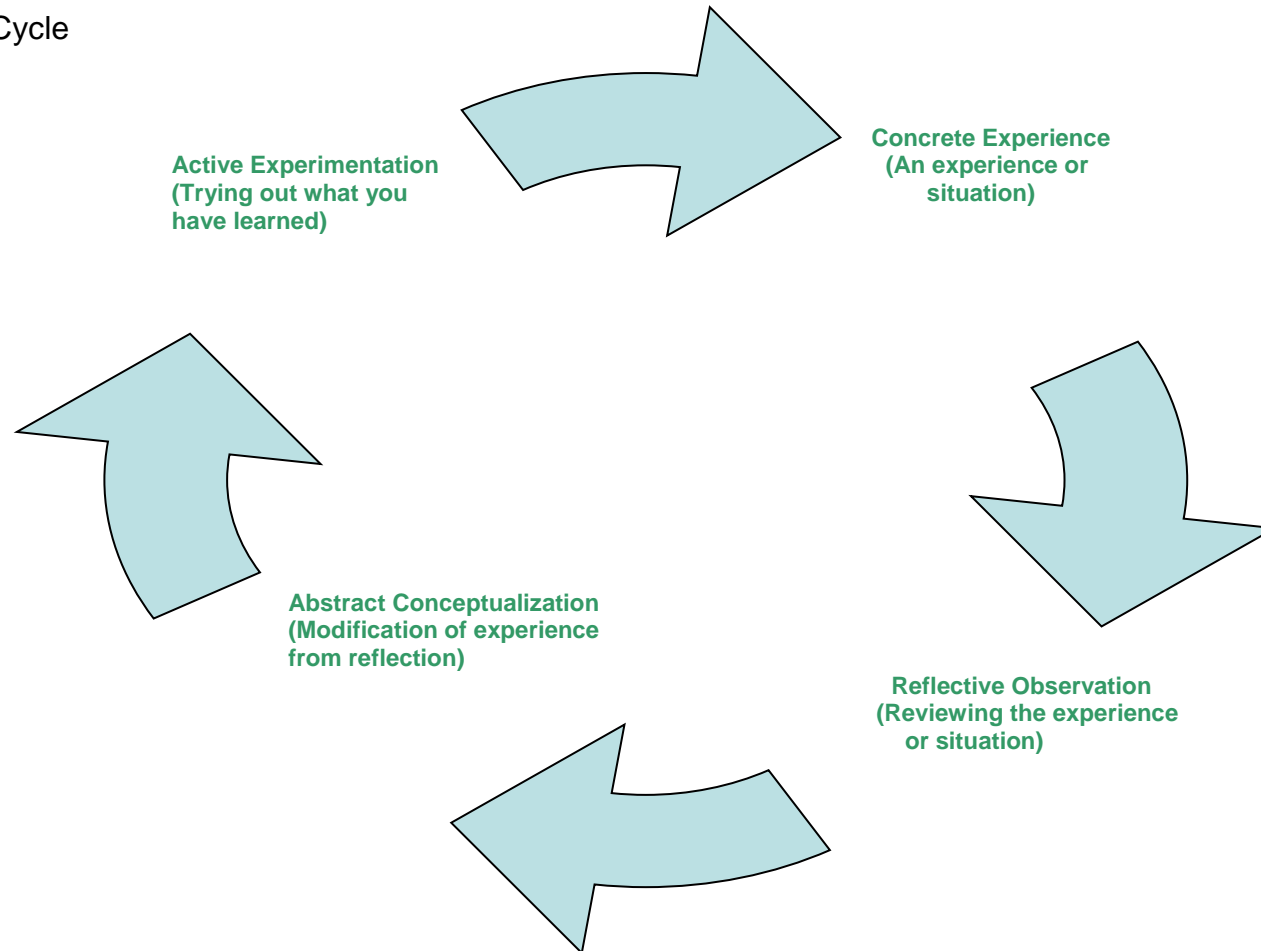
Conclusion - What else could you have done?

Action plan – What would you do next time



Kolb (1984)

The Experiential Learning Cycle



Kolb believed that learning cycle is only effective when a learner is fulfilling the whole cycle from start to finish.

Reflection in Practice:

Why should we reflect?

Reflection is a way to develop our professional attitudes, and our responses to situations. It also helps us to question what we can do to adapt or develop our professional practices. Reflection can also be a way of strengthening our decision making process on a situation. Lots of professionals are encouraged to reflect upon their roles and to respond to those reflections.

Williams (2000) cited in A.Craft and A.Paige-Smith believes that 'actions are so much more powerful if they arise from both feelings and thoughts.'

Reflection can help to ensure we are continually developing our policies and procedures to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all children and families individually.

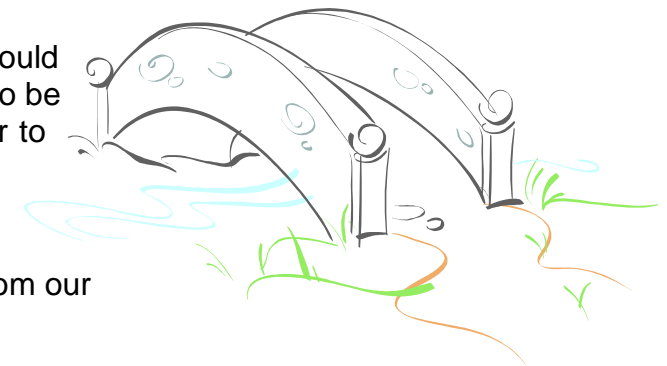
Reflection can help you to analyse your feelings and weaknesses and help to evaluate how you can improve to enhance positive feelings if a situation may occur again.

Sharing reflection within a group or setting can also help to enhance perspectives on situations. It can help to share individual interpretations which can enrich communication amongst practitioners in the setting and can also facilitate improvement in a team working together to solve situations.

What should we reflect on?

Reflection can be done on a certain event in your professional or personal life which you feel could have been improved upon or if something could have been done differently. Reflection can also be on an event with which you are happy and feel as if you have achieved something – in order to build upon repetitive successes.

It is said that reflective practice is about enhancing an understanding of our feelings through questioning and identifying how we can develop our behaviours. This can help build bridges from our professional to personal life and vice versa.



Reflection can also be about reflecting on your own personal skills and qualifications and thinking about how you can build upon these to improve your practice and to ensure you are fulfilling your potential.

Reflecting on your resources and equipment is important so that you can endeavour to ensure the resources you are providing are relevant for the individual children you have in your care as interests may change over time and to ensure you are meeting different children's needs.

How to reflect?

There are many ways in which you can reflect. This may be shared verbally or in a written format. There are many questions you may ask yourself to help reflect on a situation.

Before you decide what format you will use for your reflection you need to think what you are reflecting on.

Below is an example of a reflection log which can be used after an event or experience has happened:

- Context: (situation or event)
- Who was involved
- What happened - Give a factual description of what took place
- Reflection on experience: Looking back, why did the event or situation turn out that way? What did you do? How did you feel then? How do you feel now?
- Learning from experience and action planning: What have you learned from this experience regarding your use of your skills and attributes? What might you do differently in the future?
- What professional issues has this experience opened up for you? Are there any wider issues that link with this experience?

Examples of other reflection formats: -

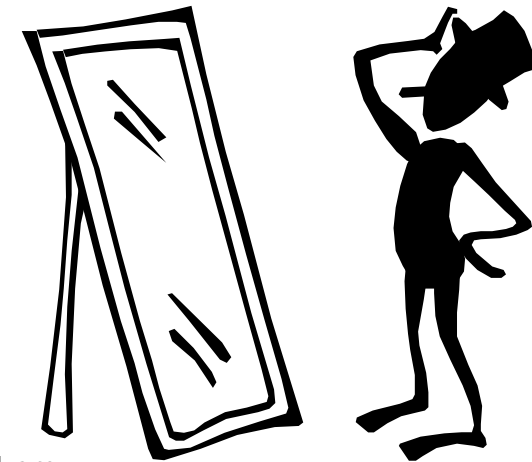
- Audits for specific areas of practice, learning contexts or resources
- Observations i.e. tracking observation to observe what part of provision is most popular
- Conversations with children
- Parental questionnaires
- Staff supervisions and appraisals (Qualification audits and training logs)
- Self-evaluation processes and completion of Ofsted forms
- Reflection Journals
- Annual development /action plan reviews and planning processes

Barriers to reflection

There can be many barriers towards reflection and feeling like you are able to reflect on a situation and then plan how to overcome any barriers in order to ensure that you are comfortable with the process.

Rita Newton describes some possible barriers which may occur, these are

- Emotions and feelings – being aware of your own feelings and how to express them
- Personal awareness – being aware of your personal barriers and how to overcome them
- The environment – in which environment are you most comfortable in making your reflection
- The implication of reflections for colleagues and teams
- Time management - the keeping of a journal



Reflecting on Practice / Self Evaluation

Before you go any further, you might find it useful to evaluate how good your practice is right now.

The questions below may help you to review your current practice and ensure that everyone is fully aware of your policies and procedures. We have provided suggested questions for the leader/childminder, staff and parents. You may choose to use all of these or just one or two sections, depending on your provision and how confident you feel about your policies and procedures. You can use the questions as individual questionnaires or use them informally through staff meetings, chats with parents etc.

When you answer these questions, don't just answer yes or no – think about the question and ask yourself:

- How do I know?
- What is my evidence and where is it?
- Is that always the case?
- Is that true of everyone using the provision?

The column for ***“Any further development needed”*** on each questionnaire is best completed by the whole team or by the childminder. This becomes part of the development plan for your provision so it's important that it is thought about and completed by the person/people who will be responsible for carrying it out.

Consider if it would also be helpful to ask parents and children their views and feedback to your provision, and how you might do this.

Questions for the leader / manager

Consider	Our current practice	Examples of evidence of this within our setting	Any further development needed Date to be completed by:-
<i>Do you reflect as a manger on your practice?</i>			
<i>Do you encourage your practitioners to reflect</i>			
<i>Does your staff team reflect together and share reflections?</i>			
<i>How do you ensure the conclusion from your reflection is responded to within your practice/setting?</i>			
<i>Do you encourage parents to reflect upon your practices?</i>			

Questions for practitioners/Childminder

Consider	Our current practice	Examples of evidence of this within our setting	Any further development needed Completed by:-
<i>Do you share your reflections with a colleague in your setting or with another professional?</i>			
<i>Do you feel the type of reflection you do in the setting works effectively?</i>			
<i>Are you being honest when you reflect to learn from the process?</i>			
<i>How can you improve upon your reflective practices?</i>			
<i>In which area of your practice do you feel you could improve upon with the use of reflection skills?</i>			
<i>Do you encourage the children to reflect upon their experiences?</i>			

Supporting Information and Resources

Useful Links

Department for Education

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education

Ofsted

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

4Children

www.4children.org.uk

Articles on Creating and thinking critically for the early years

<http://www.optimus-education.com/creating-and-thinking-critically-early-years>

More information on Kolb's learning Cycle

<http://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>

Early Years Foundation Stage development Matters page 3 learning and development cycle

Brookfield cycle of reflection

http://sydney.edu.au/arts/teaching_learning/academic_support/Brookfield_summary.pdf

EYFS Curriculum Documents

<http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/eyfs-statutory-framework/>

NYCC materials

Childcare Development Toolkit and Home Learning Environment toolkit - available from

<http://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15837>