

Learning and Development

Observation, assessment and planning

Professional reflective practice

What is a reflective practitioner?

A 'reflective practitioner' is someone who will look back at their practice including their planning, activities and the learning environment and consider what worked well and what did not. Practitioners reflect on everything they do in practice to be consistent and to help improve the learning environment. The OAP cycle is a reflective process which enables you to think and talk about children's development and consider how you can support them through your own effective practice.

How to be a reflective Practitioner?

Reflect on what you have noticed, understood, and planned for regarding the learning environment and children's development. Use the OAP cycle as your starting point and critically reflect on how you and the children have benefited from these learning opportunities. Use the 'take a step back' approach and observe, assess, listen, and have discussions with other practitioners about the children's learning and development.

The benefits of being a reflective practitioner?

Reflective practice enables practitioners to develop a critical understanding of their own practice. This will help practitioners develop the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches to achieve the best development, learning and progress for their children. It will also help to increase practitioner confidence, be more proactive and improve the quality of care and education you offer.

Case study 1:

A practitioner set up a marking making table next to the free play area. During the week she observed that the mark making table was not engaging the children in the way she had hoped. The practitioner thought about the location, the resources, and the children's involvement and overall development. Once she had reflected on this, she decided to move the mark making table to a quieter area of the room, whilst providing wet sand for the children, who really enjoy messy play.

During this practitioner's reflection she considered the children's overall interests, level of development and involvement to make the activity more meaningful and appropriate for the children. Using observations and reflecting on her findings helped to tune into the children's talking, thinking and learning to provide meaningful and appropriate next steps.

Case study 2:

A Pre-school Practitioner noticed that one of her children struggled to sit for long periods of time whether that was for registration or discussion time. The little boy found it hard to focus his attention particularly when it was a topic that was not of interest to him. This often resulted in him disrupting the group. The practitioner reflected on her practice and realised that she was expecting the children to sit for too long. By becoming more creative with her planning and choosing a focus based on the children's interest for each group time she was able to ensure that all children remained focussed and engaged.

The practitioner not only reflected at the end of the activity but during it too. She would shorten, lengthen, and even change topics depending on the children's interests and engagement.

For more on reflective practice see

Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage May 2008

Setting the Standards for Learning, Development and Care for children from birth to five (p.8-9)

https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/EYFS_Practice_Guide1.pdf

1.26 In a continuously improving setting the leader will:

- lead a collaborative learning culture – providing time and space for knowledge-sharing and support for continuous professional development for all staff
- lead and encourage a culture of reflective practice, self-evaluation and informed discussion to identify the setting's strengths and priorities for development that will improve the quality of provision for all children

1.27 A continuously improving setting will have well qualified and experienced staff who:

- understand and engage in informed reflective practice – both individually and in groups
- work collaboratively within the setting to share knowledge, question practice and test new ideas with high aspirations for every child;
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- support quality improvement processes in the setting – recognising how these processes can extend effective practice and help improve outcomes for every child;