

Ongoing reflection to develop your professional practice

Introduction

This material aims to support your ongoing reflection in order to develop your professional practice in SPHE/RSE. The sections are as follows:

- The importance of reflection
- Activities to support reflection on your practice
- Further reading.

Using a variety of tools to reflect upon and develop your practice in SPHE/RSE is an important part of your preparation for teaching SPHE/RSE and the subsequent experiences of the children in your class. Ongoing reflection is a process which supports your learning and practice, through and from your own experience. It offers new insights into self and practice: this is particularly important in SPHE/RSE. Engaging in structured reflection supports the development of professional knowledge and action by challenging assumptions of everyday practice and critically evaluating practitioners' own responses to practice situations (Finlay, 2008).

The importance of reflection

Reflection can be a very powerful tool to support you in identifying your own beliefs, attitudes and values, as well as your skills and talents in relation to teaching SPHE/RSE. Reflection can help build your confidence about what you are good at, as well as identifying areas for further learning and development. The process of reflection can encourage you to try new approaches, methodologies and resources to teach SPHE/RSE. By being reflective, you are engaging with your practice in a sustained and structured way and contributing to your professional learning and development. Reflection encourages you to develop an understanding of different perspectives and viewpoints, which can help

you to be more inclusive of children's backgrounds, values and beliefs in your teaching. Being reflective can support you in understanding how the children in your class learn and the best methodologies, resources and supports to teach SPHE/RSE. Structured reflection on your teaching can help you to identify more than if a lesson went well or not, but rather if there are barriers to learning that exist for children in your class and allow you space to consider how you can overcome these. Reflection can enable you to identify when something isn't working and give you the opportunity to try something new.

Teacher Snapshot



I find that it's important to consider how suitable my approach to teaching RSE is for different children and classes I have each year. No single approach works for every class context and I reflect on how well my approach works and if I need to add to it or adapt it. For example, I would have usually taught puberty by having the children in my class watch Busy Bodies DVD and afterwards engage in talk and discussion to reflect on and build upon learning. However, last year the children in my class were particularly shy and quiet and did not engage in talk and discussion as well as other classes. In preparing for teaching RSE, I amended my usual approach to try and meet the needs of the children I had. Instead of facilitating talk and discussion directly after watching the DVD, I created some further activities that would help me meet the learning objectives I intended to teach. So as a follow up to watching the DVD I put together a quiz and some writing activities that encouraged the children to respond, and this opened up conversation in a much more managed way, as I focused on their responses to the quiz and written activity as opposed to just their responses to the DVD. I found that this simple change to my approach met the needs of the children in front of me, helped me meet the objectives of the curriculum but it also allowed me to further develop my experience with and approach to RSE, that could support some of the other areas of learning that I had intended to cover next.

Ongoing reflection to develop your professional practice

Activities to support reflection on your practice

Self-questioning: Asking yourself questions can help you understand how your preparation can support your teaching, as well as how teaching might have differed from what you had planned. Did the SPHE/RSE lesson go well? What aspects of the lesson worked well? Were the learning experiences provided inclusive of all children in the class? How could the learning experiences be improved?

Experimenting with new ideas: Trying out new methods or approaches in the classroom can create new learning opportunities. These changes can be as simple as varying a small activity or as adventurous as changing your whole approach or plan.

Discussions with other colleagues: Drawing on support from colleagues will allow you to develop understanding and learn from others' ideas and practice. Where possible, there should be regular opportunities for teachers to collaboratively discuss the SPHE/RSE policy of the school and the approaches used to teach SPHE/RSE. It is important to take time to read your school's SPHE/RSE policy so that you can ensure that you are teaching in accordance with your school's policy on SPHE/RSE.

Observations and feedback: Being observed by colleagues will allow you to gain others' perspectives into your practice and provide feedback and ideas on how to improve. Observing your colleagues can also provide new ideas and approaches which you can try in your own practice.

Engaging the children to share their views: Listening to feedback from and having conversations with children will ensure your reflections are focused on their learning experiences. By reflecting with children, you allow them to play an active part in their learning and gain insight into what improvements would support their learning.

Engaging with parents¹: Talking to parents about their children's learning in SPHE/RSE will enable you to understand a parent's attitudes and beliefs about SPHE/RSE, as well as how they feel their child's learning and development is progressing in SPHE/RSE. These insights may help you reflect upon your practice and think about how best to meet the needs of all children in your SPHE/RSE lessons.

Teacher Snapshot

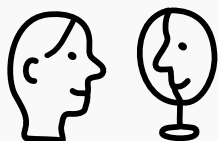


At the beginning of every school year, we host an open evening for parents. The teacher at each class level gives a talk about what the children will be learning in the different subject areas. We always include an overview of what children will be learning about in SPHE and RSE. This way, parents are aware of what will be taught and have plenty of time to think about it and come back to us and ask questions. We send out a letter to parents prior to teaching RSE, and once again, invite parents to come and talk to us if they have any questions or concerns. I always ensure that SPHE and RSE are included in conversations that I have with parents at our parent teacher meetings. It has been my experience that by keeping the channels of communication open between the home and the school about SPHE and RSE, concerns can be addressed before they become a bigger issue and you can build a trusting relationship with the parents of children in your class.

¹ Parents refers to mothers, fathers and those with parental responsibility in different parenting relationships. This may include foster parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, and carers.

Ongoing reflection to develop your professional practice

Teacher Reflection



- Thinking about your current approach to teaching SPHE/RSE, how important is reflection in your preparation for teaching? What types of reflective exercises do you engage in?
- Thinking about your use of reflection in the past, what did it help you notice in relation to your teaching? What impact did this have on your practice?
- Do you engage in collaborative reflection with your colleagues? If so, how has this benefited your practice? If not, how could this practice be established in your school?
- Do you consider the voices of the children in your class when reflecting on your practice in SPHE/RSE? If so, how has this benefited your practice? If not, what steps could you take to incorporate children's voices into your reflective process?

References

NCCA. (1999). Social, Personal and Health Education. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

Finlay, Linda. (2008). 'Reflecting on "Reflective practice"'. *Practice-based Professional Learning*. Paper 52, The Open University.

What's Next?

Further reading



Teaching Council models of reflection on professional learning: The Teaching Council have developed accessible information in relation to the concept of reflection which offer a description of the varying understandings of reflection in the literature, as well as 'models' of reflection, commonly used in educational contexts and information on tools to support reflection on professional learning.

[Reflecting on Professional Learning](#)