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**Educators' understanding of reflection within an Early Learning and Childcare Centre (Scotland)**

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## Abstract

This dissertation is an exploration into Educators' understanding of reflection within an Early Learning and Childcare Centre, providing day care and education for children aged zero to five. Reflection is an integral part of the professional development of an Early Years Educator and is reiterated within practice support documents across the sector. However, from experience of leading an Early Years team, I understand that this is not always the case; people will interpret terms differently based on their experiences, understanding, mindset and leadership. Within the literature explored, there was an underlying assumption that professionals already know how to reflect. In addition, literature highlighted a lack of agreement in defining what reflection meant. In order to gain an insight into Educators' own understandings, two research methods were used - questionnaires and a focus group. Following the analysis of the data collected, the themes of involvement, mindset and theoretical knowledge were identified. By reviewing the literature surrounding reflection and analysing the data from the research methods, the dissertation discusses the negative mindset Educators have when engaging in reflection, however acknowledges the use of collaboration in order to overcome this barrier. Educators' highlight their lack of awareness of reflective models and theories as well as the lack of support in understanding what they are. The findings indicate that Educators have an awareness of reflection, however lack an in-depth understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and how to implement it effectively. The conclusions presented suggest that there is a need for Educators to be introduced to reflection, models and theories early in their career, when gaining qualifications and during CPD opportunities, additionally Educators require support during practice to promote a positive mind-set and remove critical negativity. Finally, areas for further research are suggested to explore whether the same level of understanding is held by other Educators within other Early Years establishments across the local authority.

**Keywords:** Reflective Practice, Early Years Educator, Early Learning and Childcare, Mindset, Collaboration

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## List of abbreviations

ELC	Early Learning and Childcare
ELCC	Early Learning and Childcare Centre
FGP	Focus Group Participant
HGIOELC	How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare
PEYO	Principal Early Years Officer
QR	Questionnaire Respondent
SSSC	Scottish Social Service Council
FGR	Focus Group Respondent
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
PLS	Plain Language Statement



# Chapter 1: Introduction

Professional standards for all Scottish childhood practitioners make reflective practice an expected component of daily practice (SSSC, 2016a). Within Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), all Educators are expected to maintain a high standard of professionalism and engage in continuous opportunities to enhance their knowledge and practice, including that of reflection. The regulating body, Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) (2016a), sets out clear Codes of Practice to ensure Educators are meeting these standards and engaging in daily reflective practices. The aim of this research project is to investigate Educators' understanding of reflection within an ELCC.

The impetus for this research project came from the first and second year of my M.Ed studies where I gained a deeper understanding of reflection and reflective models, than I had when studying BA (hons) child and Youth Studies. With this developing knowledge, and earning a leadership promotion in to Principal Early Years Officer (PEYO) within an Early Learning and Childcare Centre (ELCC), I grew curious of Educators' understandings of the topic and how much they used reflection within their daily practice. Through quality assurance measures, such as informal observations of Educators' daily practice, I believed that this was not a common element of practice.

There are a range of practice support documents to aid reflective practice, published by various bodies and authorities throughout Scotland (Education Scotland, 2016; Care Inspectorate, 2019; Education Scotland, 2020; Scottish Government, 2020). However, many of the practice support documents use terminology which assumes the reader knows what reflection is and how to engage in it; individual Educators will interpret terms differently based on their experiences, understanding, mindset and leadership. In addition, much of the previous research and literature surrounding reflective practice emphasises teaching staff or primary education. Some studies do use the words 'Early Years Teachers' or 'Educators', however on closer inspection these terms are linked more to the equivalent role of a Scottish Primary School Teacher. A

primary teacher works alone with a class of, potentially, 30 children aged five to eleven, whereas the role of an Early Year Educator requires team work with colleagues to provide play and learning opportunities for children aged birth to five (Falkirk Council, online). Therefore the literature identified does not reflect the experiences of Early Years Educators.

Throughout this project, I was focused on making a difference to the ELCC and providing opportunities for Educators to develop their understandings of reflection. As PEYO I reflected on the Standards for Childhood Practice focusing on benchmark 18.2 which states 'lead practitioners will support the use of reflection on and in practice to act on and improve their own practice and that of colleagues' (SSSC, 2016b:15). Educators need support and opportunities to develop their practice and by improving their knowledge and skills the service will be enhanced, providing better outcomes for children and families. Through the use of research methods, within an interpretive paradigm, Educators would have opportunities to reflect on reflective practice through questionnaires and focus groups; as suggested by Ragland (2006), practitioner research should provide opportunities to engage in collaboration and establish shared understandings.

The specific research aim for this project is to provide an insight into Educators' understandings of reflection within an ELCC. In doing so, I will critically reflect on literature and policy while debating the relationship between theory and practice. Before proceeding further, it is important to provide clarification of the terminology used and the context of this project. The research was conducted within a Local Authority run ELCC, which provides care and early learning for children ages six weeks to 5 years. The term Educator refers to a qualified professional, level SVQ3 or above in Childcare or equivalent, who provides ELC opportunities for all children, daily (Falkirk Council, online).

This dissertation will present a review of the literature surrounding reflection and how this contributes towards Educators understandings (chapter two). Next, I move to discuss the research methodology and methods used for

gathering Educators understandings, while considering the potential limitations of these methods (chapter three). Following this is a presentation of the data collection and analysis process of the gathered data (chapter four). Finally, I discuss the findings from this project, the implications for practice and conclude with possibilities for future research. I will now proceed by discussing the research literature and Scottish publications which discuss, and contribute to, Educators understandings' of reflection.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Reflection plays an important role in professional development within ELC professions and is an expected component of practice within many practice support documents. However there appears to be a lack of clarity surrounding what reflection means and how it can be implemented daily to support practice.

The aim of this literature review is to critically present the literature surrounding reflection and contextualise the research. Specifically, this chapter will begin by discussing the definition of reflection. Following this, I will discuss four areas relating to understandings of reflection: Scottish policy and publications, reflective models and theoretical perspectives, whether reflection can be taught, and team reflection. In this first section, I begin by exploring some of the policies and publications set out by the Scottish Government and professional bodies.

### **2.2 Defining Reflection**

Although reflection is a term which is used daily within ELC, there is a lack of clarity surrounding a single definition and much of the literature studied suggests differing explanations. These varying stances on the term reflection can be seen through the following three interpretations; reflection as a constant critique of anything and everything (Bolton, 2010, Cammack, 2012); reflection as a state of learning which benefits the organisation (Schön, 1991, Bleach 2014); and reflection as deliberate thinking (Dewey 1933, Davies, 2012). These definitions are conflicting with different focuses, however they are also quite vague, leaving them open to interpretation and ultimately not providing much clarity in understanding the aim of reflection. The lack of any

clear agreement regarding what reflective practice is contributes towards the range of understandings from ELC Educators. A study conducted by Ghaye and Ghaye (1998), asked 50 Educators about the term reflection, to which everyone provided a different description.

It is clear that there are many interpretations surrounding reflection and there is a lack of consistency in producing one singular definition. However, it has been debated whether a singular definition should exist. Cammack (2012), Lane et al (2014) and Finlayson (2015) summarise that the term reflection means different things to different people; suggesting that reflection is a personal process left open to interpretation by each individual. Furthermore, Webb (1995) suggests that reflection is based on the experiences Educators have had. This view from Webb supports reflection as a personal process in which experiences are unique, with each individual recalling their own experiences. Following these views, it is possible to argue that there does not need to be a collective definition surrounding the term. However, for the purpose of this research project, there is one particular definition which will be referred to throughout – reflection as a personal process to critique practice. This definition, along with the others discussed within this section, was identified in the findings from this research project, which will be further explored later in chapter four. Having explored the meaning of reflective practice, I will now move on to discuss the links between the definitions discussed and Scottish practice documents which reinforce reflective practice.

## **2.3 Scottish Policy and Publications**

Reflective practice is an expected component of professionalism within ELC and has been a recurring feature within practice support documents over the last ten years. The term 'reflection' has been threaded through benchmarks and standards created by professional registration authorities throughout Scotland. Specifically, the formation of the SSSC in 2001 set out a clear Code of Practice for those working within care of children, encouraging Educators to

reflect, stating 'social care workers should use the code to reflect on practice and identify how to continually improve' (SSSC, 2016a:1).

Since these codes were published, there have been frequent publications from bodies such as Scottish Government, Education Scotland, SSSC and Care Inspectorate which reiterate the use of daily reflection in developing the Early Years' service (Appendix 1). However, the definitions discussed in section 2.2 are not reflected within these documents, rather references are made to the importance and benefits of reflection. Within many of the documents, reflective practice is encouraged, however it is conveyed through brief statements, with no real significance or explanation as to what should be involved or how to undertake said reflection. There appears to be an underlying assumption that Educators understand reflection and know how to undertake this process; however from my own experiences I have observed that this is not always the case.

Two early years practice documents which provide clearer guidance for reflection are; *Self-Evaluation for Improvement* (Care inspectorate, 2019) and *How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare* (HGIOELCC) (Education Scotland, 2016). The aim of these documents is similar in that they both provide opportunities for teams and individuals to reflect on their practice by posing challenge questions and offering systems to follow in order to do so. *HGIOELCC* (Education Scotland, 2016) suggests following a cyclic process of looking inwards, looking outwards, looking forwards in order to reflect on the practice being delivered and make improvements. In contrast, *Self-Evaluation for Improvement* (Care Inspectorate, 2019) provides a tiered diagram offering three questions - how are we doing? How do we know? What are we going to do now? - to enable reflection. Although these documents provide more insight into how to reflect and offer a process to follow, they still lack depth in offering explanations of what reflection means (as discussed in the definitions above) and guidance on how to develop these reflective skills. Therefore, the two reflective processes described here would only be effective in supporting the development of practice if Educators had a good understanding of

reflection prior to engaging within the process. However arriving at this definition can be complex in itself.

As mentioned previously, these documents provide opportunity for both team and personal development. When working within a team, it is important that Educators have an agreement on what reflection means. A small study by Lane et al (2014), suggested that teaching staff require a shared understanding of the importance of reflection, and what qualities are required, in order to do this effectively. This belief would differ from the previous definition of reflection as a 'personal process' as established for this study. The findings from, Lane et al (2014) suggest that Educators to adopt a shared approach, rather than a personal one. Therefore, it could be argued that if meaningful reflection is to occur within the field of ELC professionals, a collective understanding needs to be established in order to work effectively as a team.

## **2.4 Team Reflection**

The role of an Early Years Educator requires collaboration and team working; both of which are explicit components of professional practice within local and government initiatives (SSSC, 2016a). As mentioned above, the bodies such as the SSSC, Scottish Government and Education Scotland, promote the use of daily reflection. However, they also encourage and expect professionals to develop, improve and reflect through collaboration with others. For example, the Standard for Childhood Practice states that reflection should be used as a tool to act on and improve individual and collaborative practice (SSSC, 2016b:15). Furthermore, HGIOELCC states that 'practitioners can work together to reflect and evaluate' (Education Scotland, 2016:5). These examples suggest there is encouragement from local and government publications to engage in reflection collaboratively. However, reflection has been summarised, within the definitions previously discussed above, as an

individual and personal process by many - where Educators focus on and analyse their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Reflective theorist, Brookfield (1998) argues that although reflection often begins alone, it will eventually progress into a collective effort conducted with others. Finlay (2008) agrees, suggesting reflection can be both solitary or involve others. Brown (2003) further supports this view and suggests reflection should involve others, including children and a wider community of practitioners and professionals. These similar views highlight that reflection is a process which can occur individually or within a group. However, Finlay (2008) counters that this does not always happen in practice stating that undertaking reflective processes along with others, and involving them in the reflection, is often a missing link during reflective processes. Team reflection is an important component for collaboration and development. Research by Barnett and O'Mahony (2006) reinforces that as teams develop, reflection will become a standard part the team's culture. There should be a focus on building a culture of reflection where interactions with colleagues, and professional discussions, are encouraged and supported. Similarly, Ghaye and Lillyman (2012) discuss 'reflective-conversational communities' as one of the 12 principles of reflective practice. This means that Educators need to be prepared to collaborate and share their thoughts and experiences in order to build upon practice.

Involving others in reflective processes provides opportunity to view various experiences from different perspectives. Brookfield (1998) is a strong advocate for this type of reflection, stating that in order to reflect effectively, individuals need to find different lenses which reflect back a different, yet honest, image of who they are. In order to achieve this, Brookfield (1998) devised four lenses for viewing ourselves; self, student, colleague and literature. It is the lenses of students and colleagues which support the need for team reflection.

For Educators who view their practice through the eyes of others; whether it being children, families or their colleagues, they are able to gain a deeper



insight into their practice allowing for further opportunity to reflect and develop. Brookfield (1998) highlights that when Educators listen to colleagues share their own challenges, they are able to examine, analyse and broaden the theories of their own practice. Isik-Ercan and Perkins (2017) also reiterate the importance of collaborative reflection, highlighting peer reflection provides opportunities for Educators to challenge a partner within an environment they are comfortable in. However, they also highlight it can be challenging to build trust in fellow Educators and be on the receiving end of questions and critique (Isik-Ercan and Perkins, 2017). This indicates that having a shared understanding of reflection amongst an early years team, and working collaboratively through reflection, is one of the most effective ways to develop and make positive progress as a team. Considering this, staff members adopt both a positive and negative mindset when reflecting which will now be discussed.

## **2.5 Mindset surrounding reflection**

Before exploring mindset surrounding reflection, I will first define the word 'mindset'. According to psychologist Dweck (2017), the term refers to a set of beliefs people hold and use to respond to, and understand, the world around them. These beliefs inform decisions and influence the way people interpret situations. The difference between a positive and negative mindset depends on whether a person thinks positively about an experience, or negatively. Reflection can often be perceived positively or negatively; the type of mindset which is adopted – positive or negative- can impact on the outcome of the reflection which is taking place. Fredrickson (2001) devised the Broaden and Build theory to help identify the benefits of a positive mindset. The theory suggests that positive dispositions provide the opportunity to broaden individuals thinking and build on their social, psychological and intellectual skills. Fredrickson (2001) states that in contrast to a negative mindset, positive perspectives provide more opportunity for growth, long-term benefits and the ability to draw on experiences in the future, whereas a negative mindset will

narrow the thought-action process. Furthermore, a study by Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) evidenced that positive mindsets will lead to improvement within performance.

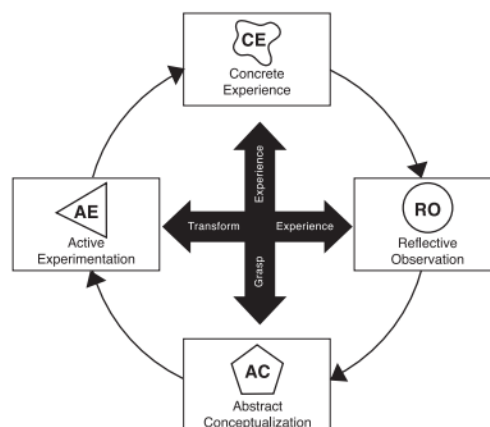
In addition to the work by Fredrickson and Joiner (2002), a study by Walter and Haun (2020) identified a link between workers' positive outlook while reflecting and their engagement with others in their team; the positive mindset which was adopted not only benefited the individual who was engaging in the reflection, but also the whole team. The use of a positive mindset supports team reflection as discussed in section 2.4 and will be further explored within the findings section. In addition to the Broaden and Build theory, there are other models and theories which would help to support Educators in understanding reflection.

## **2.6 Reflective models and theories of reflection**

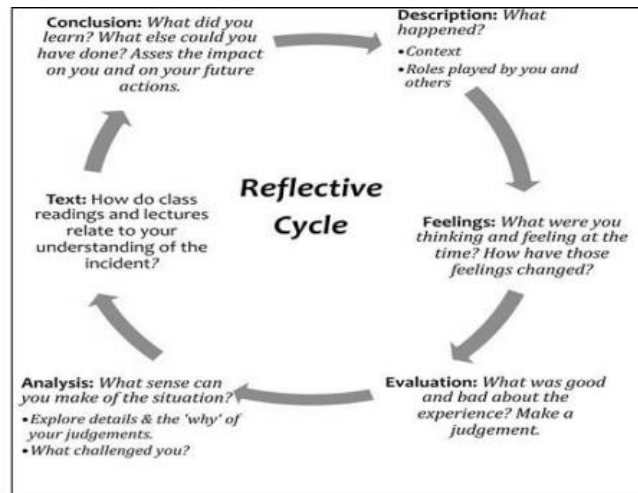
There are many models and theories which underpin reflective practice. The way in which Educators think and learn about their practice has been explored by many theorists. Influential theorist, Schön (1991), identified that Educators found it challenging to explain and talk about their practice. From identifying this he explored with reflective processes to support Educators in being able to achieve this. The overview of reflecting upon practice can be viewed as having three levels. The first level is labelled 'knowing-in action', where Educators have a level of unconsciousness – they automatically implement certain practices without thinking. However, Jones and Pound (2008) suggest that it can be challenging for Educators to discuss practice at this level as it can happen naturally without giving much thought. The second level, 'reflection-in-action', is often used in practice when something goes wrong; Educators change their practice and will consciously draw on a range of strategies they are familiar with to support the situation and make adaptations straight away. However, Brown (2003) argues that reflection during action can be challenging as an instinctive reaction can take over, meaning that quick

thinking decisions are made with no reflection or consideration. The third level is 'reflection-on-action', which will occur once the experience has happened, a process of looking back. Furlong (2000:22) describes this as a process which will take place when Educators are attempting to explain some of the outcomes that were happening during the action. This level requires the practitioner to think about what could have gone differently. Schön's reflection-on-action model of has been compared to Kolb's cycle of reflection (Brown, 2003). Schön's reflection-on-action model has relevance to this project in that it was frequently referred to throughout the data collection process to such an extent that it formed a theme – reflection on practice - and will be discussed later in chapter four.

As agreed by many, reflective practice is based on a cycle of experiences, reflection and adjustments (Aubrey, 2011). Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (figure 2.1) was devised to as a way of interpreting reflective practice and showcases reflection through four stages; do, reflect, think, plan. These stages required the practitioner to recall on experiences from previous practice, think creatively to adapt the experience and then experiment through trial and error. Kolb (2015) suggests that reflection and learning are intertwined and learning will occur while connecting the experiences and knowledge together. Enhancing this model, Gibbs produced his own, six stage, reflective model as a way of working through experiences that did and didn't go well (figure 2.2). Linking back to the above section on Team reflection, Kolb's model has been supported by a Kayes, Kayes and Kolb (2005) as a process to enhance and develop team working and engagement with others.



**Figure 2.1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb and Kolb, 2013)**



**Figure 2.2: Gibbs' Model of reflection (Gibbs, 1988)**

These models and theories can further the confusion surrounding the lack of clarity of reflection. As highlighted by Schön (1991), in order for Educators to fully engage within reflective practice, a sound understanding of these reflective theories must be present. However, there is no mention of these models of reflection within any practice guidance or policy. Childhood Practice text books and professional reading books do highlight and discuss these models and theories in detail. However, not all Educators would be aware of these books or have the opportunity to engage with them, particularly those who are not studying. To an extent, reflective practice is key to all childhood practice qualifications, however the focus during practitioner qualification courses does not usually include reference to reflective theories, rather the focus is on theories of child development (Forth Valley College, online). For Educators who already hold a qualification, these text books and professional readings are aimed at those who wish to engage in further study, particularly Educators progressing into leadership and undertaking BA Childhood Practice, and other degree level programmes. However, Tversky and Kahneman (1973 cited in Kolb 2015:19) reinforce the benefits of reading and highlight that it can be more beneficial for reflecting on personal experience due to different perspectives.

The lack of clarity within reflection continues, as local government policy and guidance do not stipulate which model of reflection is preferred, or how to put the above theories into practice. However, although there is no direct reference to models such as Kolb (figure 2.1) and Gibbs (figure 2.2), there are similarities within the guidance from practice documents. For example, the Care Inspectorate provides Educators with their own model for reflection within the *Self Evaluation for Improvement* document which suggests following a structure of ‘how are you doing?’, ‘how do you know?’, ‘what are you going to do now?’ (Care Inspectorate, 2019: 4), which is similar to Kolb’s experiential learning model (Kolb, 2015). In contrast, this model (figure 2.3) is presented within a tiered linear format within the guidance, which moves away from the cycles of reflection discussed previously.



**Figure 2.3: Self-evaluation (Care Inspectorate, 2019:4)**

Although this model is presented in a linear fashion, it does follow a similar process to that of Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, following the ‘do, reflect, think, plan’ process mentioned above, however there is no direct acknowledgement of this theory within document itself. A study on teachers’ reflection by Russell (2005) discussed that there were expectations for teachers to engage in daily reflection however there was no guidance available for them to develop those skills or gain knowledge about reflective models. Highlighting and exploring reflective theories within practice guidance documents would benefit Educators in understanding how to apply reflection

to their daily practice and the impact this can have on their development. The more Educators know about reflection, the deeper they are able to reflect, which will be further discussed within the findings chapter. Another addition to supporting Educators in achieving reflection is to explore whether reflection can be taught.

## **2.7 Can reflection be taught?**

The range of definitions surrounding reflection and how Educators can use models during their daily practice from the ELCC suggests there is little support for Educators to understand what reflection is and leads to the subject of whether reflection is something that can be taught. Russell (2005) states that promoting reflection within practice involves more than telling Educators to reflect and hoping for the best. He continues with the stance that reflective practice can and should be taught, through explicit measures. Lane et al (2014) supports this view adding that expecting Educators to reflect on their experiences is not enough for them to understand the process, there is a need for reflective practices to be taught clearly. These views resonate with my personal experience from leading ELC teams; professional dialogue and conversation surrounding reflection has not been enough to develop Educators confidence to enable them to put this into practice. Additionally, the perspectives of Russell (2005) and Lane et al (2014) help to justify the need for this research project in determining Educators' current level of understanding in order to provide more support to develop their practice. In contrast, based on a small scale study in England, Hobbs (2007) suggests that not all Educators will be capable of participating in reflection. In addition, she acknowledges that even when Educators are capable, they may find the process unenjoyable, non-beneficial or purely a waste of time. Those Educators, who have this view, may have a fixed mindset and be unwilling to change their outlook on reflection, regardless of the benefits it may have on their practice. In this circumstance, teaching Educators about reflection and how to reflect supports them to understand how to engage in it effectively,

enabling them to have a more positive experience with reflection. This is pertinent to this research project as teaching Educators about reflection will further their understanding enabling them to upskill their practice and develop high quality ELC.

Although Hobbs (2007) suggests that reflection may not be a favourable aspect of practice to some, it is also important to consider the contrary in that reflection may come more naturally to some than others. Findings from a study conducted by Gelter (2003) identifies that some Educators will be more inclined to be reflective, and may engage in doing so with no, or little, prompt from others. Gelter (2003) summarises that reflection is not due to natural instinct but, is rather, a learned behaviour; providing further evidence to suggest the need for reflection to be taught within early years professions. Furthermore, taking an international perspective, Mortari (2015) discusses the view of peoples' brains being naturally unreflective. Similarly to Schön's knowing in action, Mortari (2015) reinforces that many life events will naturally happen without individuals being aware of them. In order to reflect, conscious effort is required and the support of being taught about reflection and how to engage within it is needed in order to do so meaningfully. Further explanations of the benefits to teaching reflection and the need for this will also be discussed within the findings chapter.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The review of literature presented above suggests that there is confusion amongst Educators and a lack of clarity within the literature surrounding reflection. Scottish policy and practice support documents highlight expectations for reflection to be embedded within every day Early Years practice, yet there is no clear guidance as to how this is to be implemented or what it truly means. Although there are various theories and models of reflection, questions remain as to how well known these are to Educators. There is an agreement amongst researchers and theorists that reflection is a

personal journey, however there are also expectations for this to be embedded while working in collaboration as part of a team. The next chapter will discuss this study of a group of Early Years Educators and their own understandings reflection, in particular the methods and methodology surrounding this.



## **Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology**

### **3.1 The research**

As previously discussed, this research will aim to gather the views and perceptions of qualified Early Years Educators within an ELCC, and explore what Educators understand reflection to be and how they use it within their daily practice. In order to achieve this, consideration will be given to the methodology of the research and the methods adopted. In doing so, two paradigms which underpin empirical research will be discussed – positivism and interpretivism. Assigning the research to one specific paradigm will enable the position of the research to be acknowledged, which in turn will help to determine the methods used. Holloway and Galvin (2017) suggest that by establishing the methodology and paradigm in which the research is situated helps to guide the design of the research as well as data collection methods and analysis.

### **3.2 Understanding Methodology**

Methods and methodology go hand in hand, however have two different connotations. Methods refer to techniques and processes which are used to gather data, which will be discussed later in the project (Bryman, 2008). Methodology, however, refers to the study of said methods and provides justification for the choice of methods which are being used (Green, 2000). Research begins with questions or theories, to which different approaches are then adopted to help provide shape and direction to research. According to Holloway and Galvin (2017), the research methodology will guide the design of the study, the methods required and the analysis of the data. Considering the research methodology, and the paradigm in which the research is situated, will provide opportunity to consider the research design and overcome any constraints. There are two paradigms which will be discussed within this study

– positivism and interpretivism. Understanding the research philosophy, will help to determine which paradigm the research is situated and establish the way in which the data should be gathered, analysed and used.

### **3.3 Determining Paradigms**

A literature review by Alharahsheh and Pius (2003) suggests that no one paradigm is superior, rather paradigms are established by the overall research questions. Paradigms are used within research to help understand the differing views of researchers and the ways they aim to carry out the research. Initially, Guba (1990) identifies that it can be challenging to suggest there is one single definition for the term paradigm due to different interpretations. However, he continues by stating that the most common way to view a paradigm is as a set of beliefs which help to guide action. Cohen et al (2018) support this view, describing a paradigm as a way of looking at the world and highlight that each paradigm can achieve different conclusions, however they are all as meaningful as each other. There are many paradigms, however this research will acknowledge the positivist and interpretivist paradigms; these can be viewed as being two extreme points on a continuum. Exploring a deeper understanding of these two paradigms will help to determine which one is most appropriate for this research and will help to determine the choices which are made in relation to methods, tools and data analysis while ensuring the approaches are consistent with the justification of the research. In order to establish which paradigm this research is situated, Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest that attention must be focused towards the epistemology, axiology and ontology. According to Guba (1990) a paradigm can be characterised through these three features and the responses gained from asking ontological, epistemological and axiological questions. These elements help to form the basic assumptions, beliefs and values within each paradigm and establishes the position of the research under one specific paradigm.

Examining the three paradigmatic features in more depth provides some clarification. Epistemology relates with knowledge and is used to describe how we know something is true. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) highlight that it is concerned with the bases of knowledge and how it is acquired and communicated to other people. There is an emphasis on how the researcher can extend, broaden and deepen their own understanding within the field of research. Ontology, which is closely connected to knowledge, relates to what there is to know (Guba, 1990). Allen and Varga (2007) discuss the two features as a combined concept suggesting epistemology is 'what is inside' and ontology is 'what is outside'. Axiology refers to the role of values. Saunders et al (2012) suggest individuals' values shape intentions and aspirations which then alter peoples' epistemologies.

The characteristics of research paradigms appear differently, depending on whether the research is situated within a positivist or interpretivist paradigm. The research within the positivist paradigm aims to uncover one truth, through predictability and measuring data, doing so provides opportunity to uncover new truths. Guba and Lincoln (2005) highlight that a positivist approach seeks to find one defining answer, which can be proven and measured. From epistemological and axiological perspectives the researcher doesn't influence research, nor will they allow their thoughts, opinions and values to impact on their research.

In contrast to the positivist paradigm, is the interpretivist paradigm which focuses on reality as a social construction; the research values the views and opinions of individuals and aims to uncover how participants view reality (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The ontology within an interpretivist paradigm suggests that there is not only one truth. Guba and Lincoln (2005) discuss the epistemological characteristics of the paradigm as requiring empathy from the researcher enabling them to provide subjective judgements while maintaining validity within the results. The axiological characteristics ensure the data is interpreted based on previously gained knowledge and experiences of the researcher (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Research which is carried out within the interpretivist paradigm often requires the researcher to identify with

participants, meaning that they cannot make any judgements when interpreting data from participants. When presenting data, interpretations will be made and data will be linked to other research or theories.

The research which is being conducted within this project will fall into the interpretivist paradigm, as the aim of the research is to consult with Educators and gather their understandings, opinions and values surrounding reflective practice. The study aims to gain a better understanding of how participants view and understand reflection. The study will rely on participants' feelings and personal thoughts; it acknowledges that not everyone will have the same outlooks and perspectives. As discussed, the interpretative paradigm is associated with gathering people's interpretations and understandings and, as Matthews and Ross (2010) suggest, requires the researcher to interpret these interpretations. There are different ways in which these perspectives could be explored; the following section will explore these methods and how they are relevant to an interpretivist approach.

### **3.4 Methods**

This study will be conducted through the use of two research methods; those being questionnaires and a focus group. This triangulation will help to provide a more in depth understanding of reflection and increase the credibility of the findings (Menter et al, 2011). Characteristics of an interpretivist study include research which presents trustworthy and authentic results, this will be achieved through gathering the thoughts and opinions of participants through the combination of these two research methods. This provides broader insight into participants' understandings and provides multiple views surrounding the matter. Gallivan (1997) also acknowledges that the significance of triangulation also lies within the analysis of the data, which will be discussed in chapter five.

### **3.4.1 Questionnaires**

Using questionnaires as a method for data collection will provide opportunity to collect a wide range of information while studying the attitudes, values and beliefs of Educators (Menter et al, 2011). The aim of the questionnaire (Appendix 4) is to gain an initial insight into Educators' understanding surrounding reflective practice within the ELCC. Gaining this information via a questionnaire, provides more validity as participants are able to complete it within their own time and within an environment they are comfortable in encouraging honesty and producing honest results. Validity within research is described as producing honest and true opinions to represent what is being researched (Green, 2000). These features of questionnaires make the method suitable for an interpretivist study.

Initially, one online questionnaire will be created on Microsoft Forms and distributed to all 32 Educators within the ELCC. Participants will be provided with nine questions, which should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Green (2000) highlights the importance of keeping the questionnaire simple, in order for participants to complete it. Within this questionnaire, I have designed both open and closed questions to ensure simplicity for the participant when answering. Open questions will provide opportunity for the participant to share an individual answer; however will require more analysis at the data analysis stage (Green, 2000; Menter et al, 2011). Closed questions will offer quicker and easier opportunities for the participants to answer and will gather basic yet essential information by the participant choosing one statement or word they relate with most (Cohen et al, 2018). Using a balance of both open and closed questions ensure the questionnaire does not become complicated or time consuming to complete.

### **3.4.2 Focus groups**

There are some variations surrounding the term 'focus groups', William and Katz (2001) suggest it broadly defines as a small group of people who have a

shared interest, facilitated by someone who uses the group interactions to gain information on a topic of interest. For the purpose of this study, a focus group will refer to a group discussion, which discusses a topic which is set by the researcher (Matthews and Ross, 2010; Cohen et al 2018).

William and Katz (2001) highlight that the use of focus groups provides additional data that might not be gained from using questionnaires alone. Within this study, the focus group will follow on from the completed questionnaires, the data and responses will be analysed, providing the focus groups with clear discussion points and areas to elaborate on. The use a focus group, in addition to a questionnaire, provides more opportunity to further explore Educators understandings, experiences and values.

Participants will be invited to join a focus group and I will accept the first eight names which I receive. Wilson (1997) suggests that a focus group should take place in a non-threatening environment and should not be too big or overwhelming. In addition, Krueger and Casey (2008) discuss that it is essential to promote a comfortable atmosphere where participants can share their views and experiences in confidence. Due to the physical distancing guidance and coronavirus measures which were in place at the time, a physical meeting would not be possible for this research project as this would have breached Covid-19 procedures. Therefore, the meeting will be conducted via an online video platform – Zoom. The limitations and ethical considerations regarding the use of online research will be discussed later in this chapter. The group will consist of five to eight participants taking no longer than 45 minutes; this is the length of time Zoom automatically limits a meeting to. The use of Zoom ensures that the meeting is password protected and secure, meaning that no accidental or unauthorised access can be gained; this is important in order to ensure confidentiality. I will distribute the password to participants prior to the start of the meeting.

The focus group will take place in the evening to allow Educators to return home after completing their shift and get comfortable to log on to Zoom within their own environment. Bryman (2001) highlights that the data gathered from focus groups can be challenging to organise and analyse, however using

Zoom provides opportunity to record the focus group and access the auto-generated transcript (via OneDrive) following the session, this will help to reduce time in transcribing the discussion. Participants will be made aware of the audio and video recording facility within Zoom via the plain language statement (PLS) (Appendix 2) prior to agreeing to participate.

The PLS will provide participants with information regarding the research involved, allowing them to then make the independent decision to participate or not. This ensures that the participation from those involved is voluntary and individuals have chosen to do so freely. Cohen et al (2018) highlight the importance of giving appropriate consideration to participants' rights and refer to the concept of self-determination in order to ensure participants have the opportunity to make their own choices during research.

As with all social research, an emphasis will be placed on confidentiality and anonymity. Maintaining these aspects are important as participants have agreed to take part in the research under these conditions and are placing their trust in me, the researcher. Focus groups can present challenges with regards to the sensitivity of information and the way it is handled within the group; due to their being multiple participants each sharing their own views and opinions. Matthews and Ross (2010) suggest that participants within the group may be hesitant to contribute to discussion, particularly if they are familiar with one another and have the chance of meeting up after the focus group is complete. Within this particular study, participants know each other through the ELCC in which they work, therefore this could become a challenge. However, there are also benefits to the group all-knowing one another such as there not being any need for formal introductions between the participants at the beginning of the focus group, thus providing more time to engage in dialogue. In addition, Cohen et al (2018) highlight that participants should be part of group which enables them to feel comfortable about speaking out and sharing their views. As participants know, and are familiar with, each other they will feel more comfortable and relaxed than they would if speaking with a group of strangers.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

As researcher, I began considering the analysis of data when creating the questionnaire; the questions which were asked needed to provide the information I was looking for surrounding Educators' understanding of reflection. Cohen et al (2018) suggest that when planning a questionnaire it is important that it is structured in a way that will provide the information that is sought. This initial process ensured the questionnaire was easy to follow and the data collected would be relevant. I recognised that the analysis of the questionnaire would take some time, therefore it was important that I planned effectively to ensure there was time for the participants to complete the questionnaire, and for data to be gathered and analysed prior to the beginning of the focus group.

After the completion of the questionnaires, they were analysed to help identify themes for the focus group. This initial process consisted mainly of reading and making notes to help distinguish common themes which established points of interest and areas for further discussion during the focus group.

As previously mentioned, the focus group took place via Zoom. The use of Zoom provides the benefit of having the meeting recorded and producing an automatic transcript for analysing; this is time effective as I will not have to write a transcript following on from the meeting, rather edit the automated one. Within the transcript, all participants' names were replaced with an identifier to maintain confidentiality as discussed previously, for example 'FGR1'.

Once the transcript was completed, the participants reviewed it and were encouraged to contact me for any discrepancies. No participant contacted me, therefore analysis began. Braun and Clark (2006) recommend the use of thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. This process involves searching transcripts and qualitative data for key words to help identify reoccurring themes. A theme puts emphasis on important aspects within the data as well as creating patterns and meanings. Braun and Clark (2006) highlight that researcher judgement is crucial in identifying themes as well as the need for flexibility in doing so. Throughout



this data analysis process acknowledgement was also given to potential limitations of the research.

### **3.6 Limitations of research**

All research has limitations, however it is important to acknowledge what these limitations might be prior to conducting the research project. By doing this, the researcher is prepared for any barriers or challenges which may appear and has strategies which can be put in place to overcome these. I will now explore some of the limitations of questionnaires and focus groups. While participants are completing the questionnaire, Menter et al (2011) highlight that there is a possibility that participants could answer the questions to present themselves in a more positive light; therefore not giving accurate or honest answers, but rather answering the questions as to what they believe the 'right' answer to be. The use of anonymity will help to mitigate against this as participants are more inclined to provide honest information which cannot be traced back to individuals. Menter et al (2011) encourage the use of an anonymous questionnaire stating it encourages openness from respondents and honesty. Being aware of this limitation when analysing the data will be beneficial by considering the thought processes of participants when analysing. In addition, sending out 32 questionnaires will raise the chances of participants returning questionnaires and gaining more data in response. These features will strengthen the interpretive validity as there are greater opportunities for the research to capture the participants' meanings and views within the study.

There is the risk that participants will not complete the questionnaire or will stop participating half way through. Cohen et al (2018) highlight that completing a questionnaire can be mentally demanding and too many questions can cause the participant to withdraw part way through. However, I have given careful consideration into the questions which will be asked; ensuring that these are simple and concise. Within the PLS (Appendix 3) I

have highlighted that there are nine questions and that the questionnaire should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete, this means that participants are aware of what the questionnaire will involve and have clear expectations prior to beginning. If a small amount of data is received in response to the questionnaire, I have the benefit of using the focus group to gain further information and data.

Although, I intend for the focus group to provide more data and further strengthen the view and opinions of Educators, there are limitations within this research method also. Smithson (2000) discusses the issue of dominant voices and members of the focus group taking over the discussion. As researcher, I will encourage all participants to share their thoughts and opinions by using such phrases as 'would anyone else like to share their views on this?' and 'how does everyone else feel about that? Do you agree or disagree?'. Smithson (2000) reinforces that by using these techniques, the researcher is encouraging silent participants within the group to speak. However, Bryman (2001) cautions the researcher should intervene minimally, and only when the group is struggling during the discussion or to redirect the conversation back to the research agenda.

The relationship between researcher and participants can be challenging. As researcher, I need to be reflexive and self-aware as to how my relationship and behaviours can alter the participants' decision making and responses. Mac Naughton et al (2001) highlight there can be challenges for researchers who are Educators within the area of study and the importance of acknowledging the study from a researcher's perspective as opposed to a practitioner's. As I am their line manager, this can impact my role as researcher which be explored further within the ethical considerations. Matthews and Ross (2010) suggests that these types of relationships can change a participants responses to the research questions which are posed. Within this study, participants may be hesitant or reluctant to share their honest thoughts and feelings as they may believe it will impact negatively on their professional relationship. However, the PLS will highlight that this research will in no way impact the relationship between myself as researcher

and the participants involved – ensuring ethical goodness. This will be repeated at the beginning of the focus group, and will also remind participants of confidentiality within the group.

The importance of group anonymity is reiterated by Matthews and Ross (2010); however they also acknowledge that researchers have little control over how the information discussed within a group may be used once the discussion is complete. Working with a group of participants raises the issue of confidentiality; as researcher I cannot guarantee this. Tolich (2009) refers to this as ‘internal confidentiality’, which concerns the information which might be disclosed by the members of the focus group. I have no control over the information discussed being shared by participants outside the group. However, prior to the focus group beginning, participants will be asked not to share information which is discussed outside of the focus group and to be respectful of privacy and each other’s confidentiality. As researcher, I will ask the participants to treat all the information which is discussed as confidential with the expectation that individuals will respect each other and not share it outwith the group. In the next section, I will explore the ethical considerations of the study as a way of ensuring high quality research and respecting participants.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations and Goodness**

Ethical research concerns the researcher’s behaviour and the way the research is carried out, ensuring those involved within the research have given consent to participate and know what to expect (Cohen et al, 2018). Participants must be respected fully and consideration must be given to their feelings and opinions. It is best practice, when carrying out research, to take into consideration those who are involved and the impact the research can have on the wider community.

Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007:205) proposed a set of features to ensure effective and ethical practitioner research which highlight both

traditional and contemporary perspectives, they include; the need for informed consent from all involved, research which is transparent and shares the knowledge gained with the wider community, a collaborative culture which encourages opportunities for individuals to meet and discuss aspects of their practice, promoting transformation and creating actions or outcomes, and producing results should reflect the effort and commitment made. These principles have helped to inform the research design of this project by providing the opportunity for Educators to come together and discuss their experiences while ensuring participants have chosen freely to participate. In addition, acknowledging the benefit that the study will have on the ELCC community by identifying current understandings of reflection and providing opportunity to develop. These principles will now be further explored in more depth.

In order to achieve these ethical considerations, all research which is conducted will conform to the expected ethical standards as set out by the University of Glasgow's ethical guidelines (University of Glasgow, online). Following this system will create well-thought-out research and promote the rights of the participants. The consideration of ethics is an integral part of this research project which needs to be threaded through all aspects of the research and not just limited to one chapter. Tobin and Begley (2004) discuss 'goodness' as a method for ensuring this and state the goodness of a study should not be restricted to the methodology chapter of a study, however must be reflected throughout; ensuring goodness will result in quality research. Some of the ethical considerations made throughout the design and implementation of the research will now follow.

Individuals have the right to participate in the research, or decline, once they are told what it requires (Cohen et al, 2018; Ragland, 2006). Participants must understand what to expect when they choose to join the research and they must be given clear opportunities to enter into the research freely and willingly.

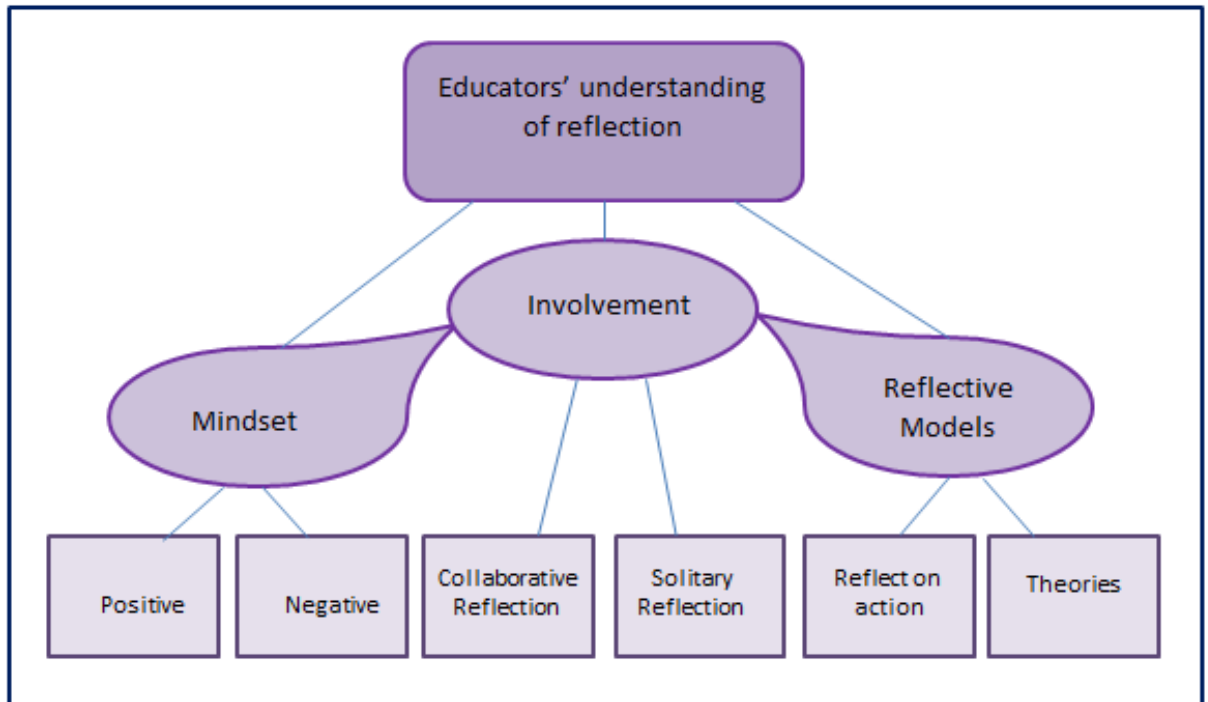
For those individuals who do choose to participate, their decision will not affect the relationship between myself and them. Matthews and Ross (2010) state researchers need to be conscious that participants may view them differently and the relationship between them can effect responses. As I am in a leadership position, participants may not be wiling share their understandings and opinions to the same level as if I was a colleague in an equivalent job role. This ethical issue could be most present within the focus group, however I will be present in order to pose questions and steer the direction of the discussion. The purpose of this research will be reiterated and I will aim to ensure participants are comfortable and relaxed throughout.

The consideration of confidentiality and anonymity will be extended to the data analysis also, in particular the presentation of data. Campbell et al (2004) recommends the use of alphabetical signifiers to replace participants' names; this avoids disclosing information and ensures anonymity of the participants.

### **3.8 Summary and Conclusion**

Having identified the data collection processes, within the interpretive paradigm, and discussing the use of questionnaires and focus groups to gather participants opinions, thoughts and feelings. The following chapter will now progress to present and discuss the data which has been analysed, while establishing links between the literature and theories discussed within chapter two.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion



**Figure 4.1:** Thematic analysis of the data from questionnaires and discussion group

### 4.1 Introduction

The intention of this research project was to gain an insight into Educators' understanding of reflection. Questionnaires were used as an initial data collection method, followed by a focus group, in which participants comfortably expanded on their thoughts and perceptions. This provided a valuable insight into Educators' understandings of reflection while ensuring ethical goodness between participant and researcher relationships, as discussed in chapter four. The use of these research methods, within an interpretive paradigm, has provided a sizeable amount of data which has been organised and analysed following the six phases of thematic analysis as detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Using thematic analysis provides opportunity to gain a rich and detailed explanation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This chapter will present the data collected and critically analyse the findings while relating back to, and reworking, the literature review discussion of chapter two. Braun and Clarke (2006) encourage engagement with literature throughout as a way of enabling the researcher to become more aware of the features of the emerging data. The data analysis process revealed information which I had anticipated and related to the literature previously discussed, other findings were more unanticipated, such as the negative assumptions surrounding reflection held by Educators. This back and forth method between literature, data collection and analysis, highlights the iterative process which is involved within this research.

Following the thematic analysis process of Braun and Clarke (2006), three main themes have been identified from the data which can be seen in figure 4.1 – involvement, mindset and reflective models. As researcher, I played a crucial part in this process; as highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006) the researcher will identify themes of interest and present them to the reader. The process for identifying these themes, as discussed by Menter et al (2011) and Braun and Clark (2006) consisted of highlighting and colour coding key words and phrases from throughout the questionnaires and focus group transcript. This data was then categorised into meaningful groups using sticky notes, creating poster size mindmaps, before condensing and refining the groups to form the themes. When combined, these three themes discuss Educators' perceptions of reflection.

Attention will initially be given to the first theme, involvement. Throughout data collection, discussion of reflection as a collaborative and solitary process appeared as a reoccurring and dominating feature as participants continued to refer back to it. Therefore, beginning this chapter with the theme of involvement will support the presentation of data and highlight the relationship between the themes. Prior to presenting the first theme, a brief summary of the language used by participants will help to set up the discussion of data.

## 4.2 Reflective terminology

Throughout the data, I identified repetitive use of reflective language. Participants regularly used terms such as *'reflect'*, *'next steps'*, *'how things went'*, and there were reoccurring discussions about wanting to improve and develop practice as well as learning from experiences. In addition, participants' ability to use this reflective language suggests that reflection is a familiar process and something that they can relate to and recall. Cohen et al (2018) highlight data will emerge from the interactions amongst the group; participants regularly recalled on their own experiences and their use of language helped to gain insight into experiences, views and understanding of reflective practice. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the discussions from participants only provide a snapshot of their experiences and this must be considered throughout the presentation of data (Cohen et al, 2018). At this point, I reiterate the study is unable to encompass the views of all Educators within an ELC context, therefore, the term Educator refers specifically to those working within the targeted ELCC. I will now move to discuss the first theme, involvement.

## 4.3 Involvement

This section focuses on involvement of colleagues in order to reflect and explores the concepts of reflection as a collaborative and solitary process. Through questionnaires and the focus group, participants highlighted views similar to Brookfield (1998) and discussed how they favour the support of others to enable them to reflect meaningfully and shared the advantages of both solitary and collaborative reflection. I begin by presenting the theme, involvement, through the discussion of collaborative reflection.



### 4.3.1 Collaborative reflection

On several occasions participants referred to 'daily PitStops' as a way for Educators to meet and discuss daily practice:

*'PitStops are a good time for adults to come together' (FGR7)*

*'use of daily PitStops to reflect' (QR1)*

*'we aim to reflect through daily PitStops' (QR10)*

Within the ELCC, daily PitStops are opportunities for Educators to come together while in the playroom and discuss significant events from the day. These PitStops enable Educators to reflect on daily experiences and plan for better outcomes. The above examples present participants use of daily PitStops as a collaborative process and reflective method; this suggests that Educators value the opportunity to meet and reflect on previous experiences and share elements of good practice. This is reinforced by Brookfield (1998), who highlights by participating in critical conversation there is opportunity to gain insight into others' versions of similar events.

Throughout the focus group there was a sense of enthusiasm and positivity from participants when discussing team reflection and the support of colleagues:

*'Having somebody giving you that positive reflection on your practice can really pick you up' (FGR6)*

*'You use each other as a team and bounce off each other' (FGR5)*

*'Team reflection is seeing things from different perspectives' (FGR3)*

Educators coming together to reflect provides opportunity to share failings and achievements amongst those with the same expertise. There is a sense of collaboration and collegiality as Educators begin to see what they thought

were unique problems are, in fact, shared by others. As Educators begin to share their own experiences and responses, others within the team are able to reflect on and adapt their own practice. These results are comparable to the work of Brookfield (1998), who states for individuals to know they are not alone in daily challenges can be a hugely positive realisation. He discusses the importance of colleagues and collaborative practice as ‘critical mirrors reflecting back to us images of our actions’ (1998:200). Similarly, these results are further supported by research from Bleach (2014), who identified a positive correlation between the increase of collaborative reflection and the improvement of quality within the learning and teaching of Early Years. In addition, a study by Walter and Haun (2020), based on work-reflection in relation to home life, did acknowledge a positive relationship between positive work-related reflection and engagement with others. This suggests that collaborative reflection is an effective way for Educators to develop practice.

Educators expressed their positivity for collaborative reflection and although reflection is ultimately a collective experience, it is important to highlight that, it often begins alone. Participants also discussed a solitary approach to reflection which will now be analysed and discussed.

### **4.3.2 Solitary reflection**

Within the questionnaires, and in response to question five; ‘*What time of day are you most likely to reflect? Why?*’, the majority of participants referred to solitary reflection and the process of reflecting alone. The two most common aspects of solitary reflection discussed were, reflecting while driving home and reflecting once the day was over.

Examples of solitary reflection	
Reflecting while driving home	<p><i>I feel my drive home, that drive home...I reflect on it for next time (FGR1)</i></p> <p><i>You totally reflect on your day when driving home. I find you reflect a lot on the day on the drive home. (FGR4)</i></p>
Reflecting at the end of the day	<p><i>I reflect at the end of my working day (QR13)</i></p> <p><i>Do it towards the end of my day (QR3)</i></p> <p><i>At the end of my day (QR2)</i></p>

**Table 4.1: Examples of solitary reflection**

The top half of Table 4.1 highlights participants' use of driving as an opportunity to reflect and the bottom half shows participants using reflection at the end of their day. These experiences are both something that is done unaccompanied; Educators within the ELC do not car share, therefore their journeys home are unaccompanied. Educators within the ELCC work shifts, finishing at different times of the day, therefore reflecting at the end of the day would be an experience which is conducted individually. A study by Rees (2007) found that Educators valued solitary reflection and being able to engage in it away from others.

However, as explored previously in section 4.3.1, reflective practice is ultimately a collective process, involving others. Therefore, this raises the question as to why Educators regularly reflect while alone. Data from this project suggests that Educators are more likely to reflect negatively while alone and positively when in a team. Although there is little supporting evidence in relation to ELC, this data is supported by a small study by Rees' (2007) based on nursing students, who discusses that those who engaged in solitary reflection did so because they were disappointed and embarrassed by their actions during practice. Within the research I conducted, data does suggest that Educators have a sense of disappointment within their practice, which links closely to negative mindset and the way they reflect, which will be discussed more closely within section 4.4. Perhaps, reflective practice within a

car or at the end of a day would provide Educators with a safe space that is familiar and comforting to them. However, Knights (1985) and HGIOELCC (Education Scotland, 2016) reinforce that reflection does not need to be a lone process and suggests strategies, such as one to one sessions with a respectful listener or small group discussions, in order to develop reflective practice.

Another detail worth drawing attention to is within the data in Table 4.1; there is a sense of reflection in – and on – action (Schön, 1991) which involves reflecting on events which have already occurred, with the end of the day, or driving home, being a good opportunity for this. This ‘reflection on practice’ aspect will be further discussed in section 4.5.

Having analysed participants’ views of involvement during reflection, and concluding that Educators use both collaborative and solitary methods of reflection, within the next section, I will now move on to analyse and discuss participants’ mindset and how this impacts on, and influences, reflection.

#### **4.4 Mindset**

As discussed in section 2.5, an individuals’ mindset can impact on the way they reflect. Data gathered from the discussion group provided evidence in that participants’ mindset can impact their reflection, and the way they reflect can alter their mindset. The data surrounding mindset which was gathered from the focus group, and not present in the questionnaire responses, was a theme which I did not expect to find.

As stated within the introduction to this chapter, the three themes interlink with each other and mindset connects closely to the theme previously explored, involvement. Educators’ mindset plays a vital role in daily practice and how they perform (Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). Attention will initially be focused to positive mindset.

#### 4.4.1 Positive Mindset

Throughout the focus group, some Educators were able to draw on their positive experiences of reflection and related this to positive outcomes. Table 4.2 demonstrates the contrasting views of participants when discussing reflection.

Examples of reflection with a...	
Positive mindset	Negative mindset
<i>Just look and see how good this has gone (FGR4)</i>	<i>critical of myself (FGR1)</i>
<i>'Being more positive when reflecting puts you in a better mood' (FGR3)</i>	<i>giving myself a hard time (FGR1)</i>
<i>'look back and go, that was a good thing' (FGR2)</i>	<i>'beating yourself up' (FGR3)</i>

**Table 4.2: Educators' positive and negative perceptions**

Discussion within the group highlighted that reflection can uplift Educators' mood. Educators discussed that by focusing on positive experiences from the day and how successful they were, as opposed to *'beating themselves up'* (FGR2) which will be discussed in the next section, they adopt a positive mindset. Findings from the data suggest that, Educators who have a positive mindset, are more likely to engage in meaningful and purposeful reflection. Similarly, research by Fredrickson and Joiner suggests that 'positive emotions trigger an upward spiral in wellbeing' (2002:172) and Ghaye and Lillyman (2012) suggest that job satisfaction is linked with positivity during practice.

In addition, participants also highlighted there is a need for more emphasis to be placed on the positives during reflection, rather than continuously focusing on the negative:

*'There should be more emphasis on the positives about reflection' (FGR3)*

*'Sometimes it's just nice to reflect on how good the day has been' (FGR3)*

*'Being more positive about reflection puts you in a better mood' (FGR2)*

Ghaye and Lillyman (2012) highlight that positive emotions come from the way individuals interpret events as they emerge, a process similar to reflection-in-action (Schön, 1991). They suggest when working within a team, it is beneficial to focus on the positives and use positive questioning to prompt this.

Fredrickson's (2001) 'Broaden and Build theory' (as discussed in chapter two) also suggests that positive emotions widen individuals' thought processes, resulting in Educators being more open minded to alternative options. Having a positive outlook will support Educators in being able to reflect more positively resulting in them developing and strengthening their practice as they recall events and experiences. With a positive mindset, there are more opportunities to try things out, experiment and improve on practice.

Participant FGR3's response, that *'there should be more emphasis on the positives about reflection'* suggests negative reflection is more common within their daily practice. Supporting this, Ghaye and Lillyman suggest to maintain positive reflection, more attention should be given to the 'what went well' aspect of the situation (2012:140). As they raise their concern that more emphasis is needed, this also raises the question of whether participants have been taught how to reflect, which will be further explored in section 5.5.1. Within the next section I will explore the contrasting view - negative mindset - which participants discussed.

#### 4.4.2 Negative Mindset

As I begin this section, I highlight that although focus group participants did discuss a negative mindset surrounding reflection, I gained an impression from the spoken and non-verbal communication that they knew this wasn't what reflection should be. The data previously presented above, which emphasised a need for more positive reflection, highlights this. Educators' awareness that reflection doesn't need to be negative suggests they understand that reflection is for recalling both failings and achievements, as discussed by Ghaye and Lillyman (2012), but perhaps there are barriers in doing so.

Throughout the discussion group, there were recurring comments which suggested that reflection was used to look back on experiences that didn't go to plan or could have been better. The use of phrases, such as '*beat myself up*' (FGR2) and '*giving myself a hard time*' (FGR1), as detailed in table 4.2 reflect this. When reflecting on an unsuccessful experience using a negative mindset, Educators' mood and feelings will be impacted – leading to a negative cycle of reflection and self-criticism (Finlay, 2008). Quinn (1998) also raises concern that this process can lead to self-disapproval and self-rejection which in turn will result in a continuous negative mind frame.

Throughout the focus group, a longer length of time was spent focusing on the negatives of reflection rather than the positives; there was only one participant who did not contribute to the discussion on negative reflection, however they did comment that '*practice benefits from reflection*' (FGR6). Participants acknowledged that having a negative mindset and outlook while reflecting is a barrier in being able to reflect meaningfully. This is important as it suggests that Educators do understand that reflection can be a positive process for celebrating and evaluating successes rather than purely used for reflecting on experiences which haven't gone well.

Interestingly, participant FGR3 states '*If you're taught how to reflect you might have a better outcome, rather than beating yourself up*' which identifies a

relationship between positive reflection and being taught how to reflect. As discussed within the literature review, there is a need for Educators to be taught more about reflection and how to engage in reflective practice meaningfully. Mortari (2015) suggests that some people are naturally unreflective and everyone has a different perspective on life; these factors could contribute to a negative mindset while reflecting. As a way of overcoming un-reflectiveness and negative mindset, Russell (2005) highlights that reflection can, and should, be taught. I will now move on to discuss Educators understandings of reflective models and theories of reflection.

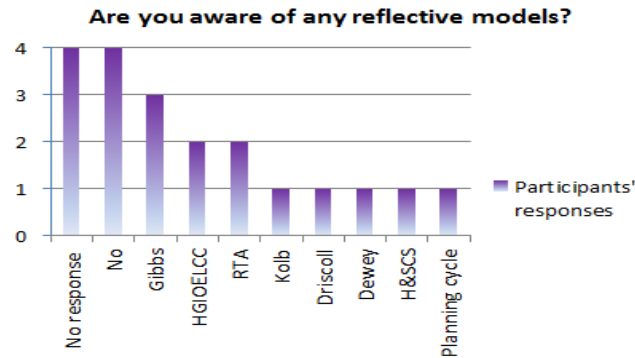
## **4.5 Reflective Models**

This theme discusses participants understanding of reflective models and how they use, or do not use, them to inform their practice. Referring back to section 2.6, this section will discuss the theories of reflection which were mentioned throughout the questionnaires and discussion group and also analyse participants' discussion of reflecting on practice.

### **4.5.1 Theories**

Data which was gathered from the questionnaire captured Educators' awareness of certain models and theories of reflection, while also highlighting their thoughts on the importance these theories have on practice. As show in figure 4.2, out of the 15 completed questionnaires, 11 participants responded to the question 'Are you aware of any reflective models?'.





**Figure 4.2: Educators share their knowledge of reflective models**

The reflective theories and models which were shared provide evidence that some Educators have a basic awareness of reflective theory. In addition to the information displayed in figure two, responses from participants included the use of words ‘*aware of*’ (QR8) and ‘*familiar with*’ (QR3) which implies that there is some awareness of these models, but could suggest that there is a lack of confidence in what they mean or how to use them. During the discussion group, participants were offered the opportunity to further elaborate on the reflective models mentioned, when asked *how do you use reflective models?*, however an absence in any response from focus group participants reinforces a lack of confidence and understanding in how to use these theories. The lack of elaboration from the participants could suggest that Educators are not aware of, or do not value, the relevance of reflective theories. Lindon and Todd (2016) suggest that one of the barriers to Educators becoming reflective Educators is they feel it is a practical job and not one which requires deep thought or the study of theory. They continue by highlighting Educators with this perspective can become fixated in what works for them and avoid learning about reflection to develop practice.

Questionnaire respondents also shared that they view various curriculum and practice based documents (HGIOELCC, HSCS, RTA) as reflective models (figure 4.2). As there are aspects of reflection mentioned within these documents, the examples of practice and statements within the documents can be used as reflective tools to develop practice. However, as discussed

within the literature review, the increase in government publication has produced some lack of clarity in how to carry out this reflection.

It can be seen in the data from figure 4.2 that Educators have an awareness of documents which reference reflection. HGIOELCC (Education Scotland, 2016) is an invaluable document for Educators to gain knowledge and ensure high quality practice, there are also elements of reflective models evident within the document. However, if the practice guidance documents such as Realising the Ambition (RTA) (Education Scotland, 2020) and Health and Social Care Standards (H&SCS) (Scottish Government, 2017), which were mentioned in figure 4.2, were to be compared to that of Gibbs (1988) and Kolb (2015), they would not be categorised as reflective models as there is no structure or process to follow in order to carry out the reflection. In addressing Educators understanding of reflective models, it is worth highlighting that Educators identified RTA (Education Scotland, 2020) as a document which discusses reflection; the document has a specific chapter dedicated to improving practice through reflection. In contrast, the Health and Social Care Standards, which were referred to by Educators, do not provide any detailed explanation of what is expected in terms of reflective practice. In this instance, the participants' lack of awareness of reflective models, can pose as a barrier to enabling them to reflect meaningfully.

In addition to above responses, when asked '*are you aware of any reflective models?*', four participants responded with 'no', and four participants provided no response (figure 2). Furthermore, one participant highlighted their lack of awareness by writing:

*'Wasn't sure what this question meant, googled it to understand more' (QR14)*

The participants who answered 'no' and participant QR14 all had zero to five years of qualified experience and the participants who provided no response had either zero to five, or 15 plus years of qualified experience. The amount of qualified experience amongst the participants who provided other responses varied between zero to five years and 10 to 15 years. Therefore

the range of qualified experience between participants and their responses varied and there was no consistent pattern within the data. However, it is possible that there are factors which could have contributed to a lack of response, and 'no' response from participants - perhaps the terminology of 'reflective models' is not something which is familiar or participants have not had the opportunity to learn about reflective models. However, Lindon and Todd (2016) suggest that continuous professional development is a priority within early years; they stress that for genuine reflection to occur Educators need to look to continuous learning and remove the stigma of once qualified, study is no longer required.

Having identified that some Educators have an awareness of reflective models, I will now move to discussing Schön's reflection in - and on - practice model which was discussed in detail within the literature review.

#### **4.5.2 Reflection on Practice**

Throughout the data analysis process, I identified there were commonalities within the language used by participants across both research methods. When participants shared what reflection meant to them, there was a reoccurring theme of reflecting on practice and the repeated use of the terminology '*looking back*' suggested this. In addition, participants also discussed '*reflecting on*' experiences and events as a process for reflecting (Table 4.3).

<i>Looking back</i>	<i>Reflecting on</i>
<i>'Look back and take the positives and the negatives' QR9</i>	<i>'when you come back and reflect' FGR5</i>
<i>'You're constantly looking back'...FGR3</i>	<i>'Reflect on my morning' QR9</i>
<i>'Looking back helps you'... QR9</i>	<i>'I find myself reflecting on practice...easier to reflect on a situation after it has happened' QR6</i>
<i>'Looking back at my practice and all I have done'...QR15</i>	<i>'...reflect on practice to support...personal development' QR4</i>
<i>'Reflective practice is when you look back and see how things have gone'... QR9</i>	<i>'I reflect on all the events [of the day]' QR2</i>
<i>'Reflective practice is looking back at what you have done and considering things like why you have done it'...QR3</i>	

**Table 4.3: What reflection means to participants**

Although not explicitly mentioned by any participant their perceptions of reflection, as *'looking back'* and *'reflecting on'* practice, can be related to the work of Schön (1991) and his 'reflection-on-action' model. As previously discussed within the literature review, this model helps Educators to evaluate their practice and consider what was happening during a particular event. According to Schön (1991), reflection on - and in - practice are the reflective traits needed in order for Educators to continuously develop and learn. The way participants discussed *'looking back'* indicates they can reflect back on what has already happened and suggests this is something that they do regularly, possibly without giving much thought , as an informal experience. This information suggests that Educators do have some understanding of reflection and an awareness of how to reflect. However, as participants do not discuss in detail how they do this, the extent of their understanding is unclear and could perhaps be summarised as more of an awareness. Chapman highlights that effective 'reflection on practice' should include Educators 'examining, framing and attempting to solve dilemmas' (2009:121). However, these stages are not demonstrated through participants' responses within Table 4.1. Therefore more intervention is required to support Educators to engage in meaningful reflection, through being taught how to reflect and begin offered professional learning opportunities which will be later discussed within the next chapter.

## 4.6 Conclusion

It is apparent from this discussion, that Educators do have some understanding of reflection. Their ability to use terminology to discuss reflection and highlight how beneficial it is for them to engage in as a team demonstrates this. However, due to information from participants highlighting their negative mindset and lack of knowledge regarding reflective models/theories, questions remain as to the depth and extend of this understanding. Responses have provided a basic level of understanding, with a lack of in depth discussion or acknowledgement to aspects of reflection. Perhaps this is due to a lack of education or experience in reflection. The next section will now move on to discuss how these findings have implications for practice.

# **Chapter 5: Implications**

## **5.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter, I will summarise the previous sections and take into account the limitations of the study. Reflecting on the findings from the research in the previous chapter, I will outline the implications for Early Years Educators within my setting, myself and for wider practice. The term Early Years Educator refers to SVQ childcare qualified professionals working with children aged six months to five years old. As suggested by Armino and Hultgreen (2002), the presentation of these insights from the data demonstrates goodness within the research. The dissertation will conclude by highlighting any opportunities for future research. I will now begin this section by providing an overview of the dissertation.

## **5.2 Rationale and Literature Review**

The objective of this study was to explore Educators' understanding of reflection within an ELCC. Reflection was an aspect of practice that I became interested in when studying the taught component of the MEd Childhood Practice. As PEYO within an ELCC I became naturally curious as to Educators' understandings of this, particularly as it was not something that was implemented by Educators within the centre at the time. As discussed in chapter two – Literature Review, I observed an increase in Scottish Government publications and practice guidance documents (Building the Ambition (Education Scotland, 2014), Realising the Ambition (Education Scotland, 2020), HGIOELCC (Education Scotland, 2016)) which reiterated the importance of reflection. Similarly, the SSSC Codes of Practice (SSSC, 2016a) set out clear expectations that reflection is an integral part of practice. However, although I found that reflective practice was an expectation within

Early Years professions, there was little information available to Educators to support them in engaging in effective and purposeful reflection.

The Literature Review (chapter two) explored the lack of clarity in defining a single definition for reflection, concluding that it is left open to interpretation and means something different to everyone. However, as Lane et al (2014) identified, there is a need for a shared understanding among teams in order to achieve goals and this shared understanding amongst Educators would strengthen practice ELCC establishments. Secondly, comparisons between team and solitary reflection were discussed drawing attention to Brookfield's (1998) four lenses and the ability to utilise support from colleagues in order to engage in deep and meaningful reflection. Thirdly, literature surrounding reflective models was analysed while considering the confusion perceived by Educators in embedding a particular model within their practice. Lastly, consideration was given to the literature surrounding the discussion of whether reflection can be taught, and it was acknowledged that for some, reflection will come more naturally.

### **5.3 Methods and Limitations**

Throughout the research I was mindful of the limitations which were explored in section 3.6. Considering these limitations prior to conducting the research ensured I was prepared for any barriers throughout and enabled me to confidently conduct a small scale study. The focus group went well; all participants appeared to speak freely and shared their thoughts openly, no participant dominated the discussion and everyone contributed equally, which were potential limitations identified by Smithson (2000). I aimed to recruit between five and eight participants for the focus group and resulted in seven, which provided an adequate amount of participants for conducting the focus group, as highlighted by Cohen et al (2018).

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the focus group was conducted via Zoom. Although this was beneficial in enabling the research to take place, the virtual discussion presented as more unnatural. There was a delay when participants were speaking which led to the inability for participants to 'jump in' to certain areas of conversation. This meant that some opinions might have been missed as the flow of conversation was not as natural than if all participants were in a room together.

As discussed throughout this dissertation, the interpretative paradigm is associated with gathering people's interpretations and understandings and the data gathering techniques used – questionnaires and focus group – provided triangulation resulting in gaining a more in depth understanding from participants and increased the credibility of the findings (Menter et al, 2011). However, response rates for the questionnaires were lower than anticipated; out of 32 questionnaires, 15 were completed. Although this still provided a sizable amount of data, the data does not represent all Educators within the ELCC. Therefore, the results only speak for less than half of the ELCC team, and would only be representative of this ELCC; opportunity to broaden this research data will be discussed in section 5.6.

## **5.4 Summary of findings**

Through the use of questionnaires and a focus group I gathered data which demonstrated Educators' understanding of reflection within the ELCC. Following Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis, I analysed the collected data by sorting and organising it to gain understanding. One of the themes which emerged from my analysis of data was the negative mindset which was adopted by Educators during reflection; using reflection as a means to '*beat themselves up*' and '*criticise*' their practice when things didn't go well. This perception also relates to the definition of reflection as discussed within chapter two, in that reflection as a constant critique of anything and everything (Bolton, 2010). Educators acknowledged that they are more likely to have this



mindset when engaging in solitary reflection and, in contrast, found collaboration and group reflection supportive in changing their outlook to reflect positively and purposefully. The findings around group reflection are generally compatible with that of Barnett and O'Mahony (2006), Ghaye and Lillyman (2012), Brookfield (2017) and Thornton and Cherrington (2019) who recognise the benefits of team reflection and reinforce the use of this within practice.

Further findings around the meaning of reflection suggested that Educators know how to reflect purposefully. However, to them, the term reflection meant more about looking at the mistakes which were made and how they should have responded differently to situations. These findings broadly resonate with those of researchers such as Ghaye and Ghaye (1998), Cammack (2012) and Finlayson (2015) in that reflection is left open to interpretation and there is not one definitive meaning. The theme of mindset was not something that was initially explored within the literature review which resulted in this being re-worked, highlighting the iterative process which is involved within an interpretative paradigm.

In addition, further themes were established, participants demonstrated an awareness of reflective theorists, however did not explore these in further depth or explain what they mean to their practice. I was able to interpret participants approach to reflection as consistent with Schön's (1991) reflection-on-practice theory as they used terminology such as '*looking back*' and '*reflect on*' to discuss ways in which they reflect. These findings suggest that Educators do not have an in depth understanding of reflective models or theories, or how they can benefit their practice if used meaningfully. These findings and the need for more emphasis on theoretical perspectives were also discussed within the literature review, and although Russell (2005) was highlighting that there was minimal guidance available for Educators in 2005 the research from this dissertation suggest that this is still the case.

## **5.5 Implications**

The findings discussed above indicate that there is a lack of understanding amongst Educators in the setting, surrounding reflective theories and models and how to reflect purposefully. Therefore, this study would offer suggestive evidence that intervention is required to support Educators within the ELCC, with the possibility for broadening this out across the ELCC workforce in general. This next section will now move to discuss the potential opportunities for teaching reflective practice and developing a model of reflection, while also considering the implications for my own practice through autobiographic reflection.

### **5.5.1 Teaching Reflection**

This study appears to support the argument made by Jones and Jones (2013) and Poom-Valickis and Mathews (2013) for a change in the way reflective practice is taught. More opportunities are needed for Educators to learn and understand about reflection, and training in reflection should be part of their qualification. Reflecting on my own experience and education, it was not until I entered my studies within Childhood Practice at a Post Graduate level that I explored reflective practice, theories and models. Prior to this, I completed both a Higher National Certificate in ELC and an honours degree in Child and Youth Studies, during which I complete some reflective accounts, however never explored the reasoning behind this or particular models to support in doing so. Previous research has suggested reflective practice is a core component for development and improvement (Russell, 2005; Lane et al, 2014) and this dissertation has highlighted that reflection is a requirement for meeting professional standards and following good practice as stipulated by the SSSC (2016a). Therefore there is a need for Educators to understand how to do this in order to provide the best service for children and families.

There is a need for reflective practice to be taught and introduced at a HNC/SVQ level as these are the minimum qualifications required to become an Early Years Educator. While I recognise that reflective practice is a component of further ELC study courses, such as BA and PGDip, these qualifications are not something that is pursued by all Educators rather are for those looking to develop their career. I will now move to discuss the opportunities for creating a reflective model within the ELCC.

### **5.5.2 Creating a reflective model for the ELCC**

Throughout the focus groups, participants were signposted to Kolb's model of reflection and Schön's reflection on -and in-action theory. During the focus group, participants indicated that they would like to use reflection as a way to recall more positive experiences. Since distributing the questionnaires and conducting the focus group, I have seen no evidence of development in the use of reflection within the ELCC, or in the understanding of Educators; I had anticipated that this would have been a benefit of carrying out the research. Furthermore, participant FGR3 highlighted that it would be useful to have some support for reflecting and guidance in how to do so. As there was only one participant who voiced this view, this could be seen as a rational explanation for the lack of clear change in practice. However, along with the findings in section 4.5, a reflective framework or model may play an important factor in supporting Educators to use reflection within their daily practice.

Participants indicated a level of awareness of Schön's reflection-on-action theory, therefore providing Educators with information on this theory can benefit practice may be beneficial in providing further knowledge and guidance. Additionally, as PEYO within the ELCC, I plan to involve Educators in the process of developing a reflective cycle, similar to that of Gibbs (figure 2.1) or Kolb (figure 2.2), which will provide opportunities for Educators to gain a deeper understanding and provide a visual cycle for Educators to follow to aid reflection.

Furthermore, it is important not to dismiss negative reflection and solely focus on positive reflection. Negative reflection provides possibilities to deal with negative thoughts and develops coping strategies and a solution focused approach. Along with teaching reflection, Ghaye and Lillyman (2011) encourage the use of the 'three good things method' which encourages Educators to reflect on their day and focus on three aspects that went well, while considering why they went well and what can be adapted for next time. As well as implications for Educators, this study has also provided opportunities for my own practice.

### **5.5.3 Autobiographic reflection**

Throughout this study, I have been able to develop my own understanding of reflection as well as develop my ability to conduct practitioner research. Data collection is becoming an increasing part of my role as PEYO, and my ability to learn about, and use, research methods throughout this study will be invaluable within my current practice.

Furthermore, through research and reading, my knowledge of reflection has grown and I have gained more depth to my own understanding surrounding the topic. In turn, this has developed my practice as a leader within the ELCC; I have become more confident in using reflection to develop my own practice and using reflective models to support areas for improvement within the ELCC as well as supporting Educators within their daily practice. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler highlight that practitioner enquiry should be 'transparent in its process' and researchers should share their knowledge and ideas in order to build a community (2007: 205). Considering this, sharing the findings of this study with the local authority ELC team would provide opportunity for me to share my insights into a very important aspect of practice which also opens possibilities for further research.

## **5.6 Possibilities for further research**

As this was a small scale study, there would be further opportunity for research to expand beyond the ELCC and look into Educators' understandings of reflection within the Local Authority context. It would be beneficial to analyse data from across a range of ELCCs to establish whether the themes from this study are common amongst other professionals. Gathering further data from a range of ELCCs provides insights into areas of good reflective practice and provides opportunities to share this practice with colleagues, this would open up opportunities to enhance collaborative working and upskill Educators.

Furthermore, there are other opportunities for further research within the ELCC. As researcher and PEYO within the setting, there is opportunity for me to continue the study into Educators' understandings. This could be done by incorporating different research methods such as observational practice and reflective diaries. As discussed in section 5.5.2, if introducing a new reflective model into the ELCC it would be beneficial to conduct further focus groups or questionnaires to measure the impact on practice and track professional development.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to investigate Educators' understanding of reflection within an ELCC. Governing bodies highlight the expectance of reflection within daily practice, and practice guidance documents reiterate the importance. However, surrounding literature suggests that reflection is left open to interpretation and findings from this study reinforce this. To summarise, Educators have an awareness of reflection and highlighted their enthusiasm in using team reflection as a tool for doing so. The study highlighted there is a lack of in depth understanding of reflection which is evidenced through Educators use of reflection as a way of recalling negative events and

criticising practice. Although this research is merely a snapshot into Educators' understandings, the use of CPD and introducing a reflective model to the ELC may provide opportunity for Educators to develop this understanding and in turn support them in the delivery of high quality practice.

## Appendix 1: A range of practice documents which discuss elements of reflection

Date	Title	Produced by	URL
2003	Codes of Practice	SSSC	
2010	Out to Play	Scottish Government	<a href="https://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Out-to-Play_practical-guidance-for-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-in-early-learning-and-childcare.pdf">https://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Out-to-Play_practical-guidance-for-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-in-early-learning-and-childcare.pdf</a>
2010	Growing up in Scotland	Scottish Government	<a href="https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2010/04/growing-up-scotland-health-inequalities-early-years/documents/0097973-pdf/0097973-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0097973.pdf">https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2010/04/growing-up-scotland-health-inequalities-early-years/documents/0097973-pdf/0097973-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0097973.pdf</a>
2010	Pre-birth to three	Learning and teaching Scotland	<a href="https://stramash.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/elc2_prebirthtothreebooklet.pdf">https://stramash.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/elc2_prebirthtothreebooklet.pdf</a>
2011	Joining the dots: A better start for Scotland's Children	Deacon, S.	<a href="https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/members/divisions/scotland/faculties/scotland-faculties-child-joining-the-dots.pdf?sfvrsn=ab8ad66d_2">https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/members/divisions/scotland/faculties/scotland-faculties-child-joining-the-dots.pdf?sfvrsn=ab8ad66d_2</a>
2014	Building the Ambition	Scottish Government	<a href="https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1459/building-the-ambition-national-practice-guidance-on-early.pdf">https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1459/building-the-ambition-national-practice-guidance-on-early.pdf</a>
2014	The Framework for Continuous Learning (13 Capabilities)	Donnelley	<a href="https://lms.learn.sssc.uk.com/pluginfile.php/64/mod_resource/content/1/clf.pdf">https://lms.learn.sssc.uk.com/pluginfile.php/64/mod_resource/content/1/clf.pdf</a>
2016	My World Outdoors	Care Inspectorate	<a href="https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3091/My_world_outdoors_-_early_years_good_practice_2016.pdf">https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3091/My_world_outdoors_-_early_years_good_practice_2016.pdf</a>
2016	Getting ready to read	Care inspectorate	<a href="https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1511/getting-ready-to-read.pdf">https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1511/getting-ready-to-read.pdf</a>
2016	How Good is Our Early Learning	Education Scotland	<a href="https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK1_NIHeditSelf-">https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK1_NIHeditSelf-</a>

	and Childcare		<a href="#">evaluationHGIELC/HGIOELC020316Revised.pdf</a>
2017	Health and Social Care Standards	Scottish Government	<a href="https://www.gov.scot/publications/health-social-care-standards-support-life/documents/">https://www.gov.scot/publications/health-social-care-standards-support-life/documents/</a>
2019	Self-evaluation for improvement – your guide	Care Inspectorate	<a href="https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/Self_evaluation_for_improvement_-_your_guide.pdf">https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/Self_evaluation_for_improvement_-_your_guide.pdf</a>
2019	Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit	Inspiring Scotland	<a href="https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf">https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Loose-Parts-Play-Toolkit-2019-web.pdf</a>
2019	Scottish Early Childhood, Children and Families, Transition Position Statement	Education Scotland	<a href="https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/nih105-ScottishEYTransitionsPositionStatement0519.pdf">https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/nih105-ScottishEYTransitionsPositionStatement0519.pdf</a>
2020	Realising the Ambition	Education Scotland	<a href="https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf">https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf</a>
2020	National Improvement Framework	Scottish Government	<a href="https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/12/2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/documents/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/govscot%3Adocument/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan.pdf">https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/12/2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/documents/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/govscot%3Adocument/achieving-excellence-equity-2021-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan.pdf</a>
2021	A Quality Framework for day care of children, childminding and school aged children	Care Inspectorate	<a href="https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/4465/a-quality-framework-for-daycare-of-children-childminding-and-school-aged-childcare.pdf">https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/4465/a-quality-framework-for-daycare-of-children-childminding-and-school-aged-childcare.pdf</a>



## Appendix 2: Focus Group Plain Language Statement



Masters of Education in Childhood Practice

### Plain Language Statement

Educators' understanding of reflection within an ELCC

The research will be carried out by: Lucy Mason

Contact details: [2421158M@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2421158M@student.gla.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Elizabeth Black

Contact details: [elizabeth.black.2@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:elizabeth.black.2@glasgow.ac.uk)

### **Focus group**

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

#### **Purpose of the study:**

The aim of this study is to gather Educators' views of Reflection and how this is applied to current every day practice at [REDACTED]

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

Following on from the questionnaire you have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a focus group (a group of five to ten Educators) to take part in a discussion about Reflection and how you use it within your daily practice.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

Even if you have already volunteered, it is still up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw without giving a

reason until two weeks after the focus group, after which data analysis will have begun and it will no longer be possible to withdraw individual data.

A decision not to participate or to withdraw will not affect your relationship with myself as Depute. While the general findings from the research might contribute to quality assurance within the ELCC, as a participant you will not be impacted positively or negatively during participation.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

By taking part in this focus group you will be asked to discuss questions relating to reflective practice.

You will be provided with a consent form, you will need to sign this to consent to participating within the research. You will be sent a Zoom link via email to join an online meeting, followed by a password to ensure the meeting is secure. The discussion will take no longer than 45 minutes. You should find a safe and quiet space within a comfortable environment in which you can guarantee you are alone and will not be interrupted; this will ensure confidentiality during the discussion.

The focus group will be recorded via video and audio to support accurate transcription. Prior to the discussion being analysed, you will be provided with a copy of the transcript to review on OneDrive via email.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential; however, individuals may be identified within the transcript from the focus group through comments or phrases. Within the transcript, participants names will be replaced e.g. 'Participant A'. All those who are involved in the discussion will be encouraged to maintain confidentiality in relation to any personal information shared during the discussion. You will be asked not to respect fellow participants and not discuss any topics out with the focus group; however this cannot be guaranteed by the researcher.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases, although unlikely, the Head of Centre will be notified and the University and Local Authority may be obliged to follow disciplinary procedures or report fitness to practice to the SSSC.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The information gathered from the focus group will be recorded via video and analysed.

The data will be stored on a Microsoft Office password protected system, then analysed and discussed within a dissertation. The results will be destroyed at the end

of the study by which time you will be able to view the published results. A hard copy of the final dissertation will be printed for [REDACTED] You will not be identified by name within the study. The results may also be presented within Journal Articles, conference papers or a written summary.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has been reviewed by the School of Education Ethics Committee.

If you (participants) have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project you can contact the School of Education Ethics Officer, email:

[Barbara.Read@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Barbara.Read@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix 3: Questionnaire Plain Language Statement



Masters of Education in Childhood Practice

### Educators' understanding of reflection within an ELCC

The research will be carried out by: Lucy Mason

Contact details: [2421158M@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2421158M@student.gla.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Elizabeth Black

Contact details: [elizabeth.black.2@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:elizabeth.black.2@glasgow.ac.uk)

### Questionnaire

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

#### Purpose of the study:

The aim of this study is to gather Educators' views of Reflection and how this is applied to current every day practice at [REDACTED]. The research will take place in two phases; phase one (questionnaire) will involve all team members who wish to take part, phase two (focus groups) will involve the first ten volunteers.

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as you are a member of the team at [REDACTED]. All 32 members from the team are invited to participate in this first stage of research.

#### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason until you have submitted your questionnaire response, as all responses will be anonymous.

A decision not to participate or to withdraw will not affect your relationship with myself as Depute. While the general findings from the research might contribute to quality assurance within the ELCC, your employment will not be impacted positively or negatively by participation.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

Taking part in this questionnaire will require you to answer 9 questions, which should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

You will be invited via a link on WhatsApp which will provide you with access to a 'Microsoft Forms' questionnaire. Following completion of the questionnaire, you will be invited to participate in a focus group; this will provide opportunity to expand on your answers from in the questionnaire. The focus group is voluntary and will take no longer than 40 minutes.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. The questionnaire does not require you to enter your name or any other personal details, however individuals may be identified through comments or phrases.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the Head of Centre will be notified and the University and Local Authority may be obliged to follow disciplinary procedures or report fitness to practice to the SSSC.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The information gathered from the questionnaire will be stored on a password protected system, then analysed and discussed within a dissertation. The results will be destroyed at the end of the study by which time you will be able to view the published results. A hard copy of the final dissertation will be printed for [REDACTED]. You will not be identified by name within the study. The results may also be presented within Journal Articles, conference papers or a written summary.

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has been reviewed by the School of Education's Ethics Committee.

If you (participants) have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project you can contact the School of Education's Ethics Officer, email:

[Barbara.Read@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Barbara.Read@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4: Reflective Practice Questionnaire

1. How many years have you been qualified as an early year's educator?
2. What is your understanding of reflective practice?
3. Please note the main reflective practice techniques, if any, you use throughout your practice.
4. How often do you engage within reflection practices throughout your day?
5. What time of day are you most likely to 'reflect'? Why?
6. Please share your own views by marking one box in each row.

How important do you consider...

	Not at all	Not really	Somewh at	Very	Essential
Reflection to be for your practice?					
Writing reflective diaries/ journals which can be reviewed					
Further research of relevant theories/ guidance					
Engaging in informal/ professional dialogue with colleagues					
Receiving feedback from others i.e. supervision, reviews					
Observing the practice of other professionals					

7. Are you aware of any reflective models? If yes, please note them down.
8. How supported are you to actively use these reflective models?
9. Are there barriers to reflective practice? If so what are they?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

To further discuss the information which you have shared within the questionnaire, you are invited to join a 'focus group'. Please see the signup sheet in the staff room if you would be interested in participating.





## Appendix 5: Extract of transcript analysis: Involvement

Extracts from the data illustrating analysis

	Involvement			
	Collaborative reflection		Solitary reflection	
	Involving others	Daily PitStops	End of the day / in the car	Personal
Focus Group Responses	<p>When I reflect on things I see how the children might have seen something and how they interpret that FGR5</p> <p>I think that children can definitely influence our reflection FGR7</p> <p>As soon as I'm with my team, I'm like, well that went really well guys. You use each other as a team and bounce off each other. It comes down to the whole team working thing FGR5</p> <p>If you're beating yourself up, someone can be like, actually no, like, we can make it better by doing this FGR5</p> <p>I feel like your team kind of helps you with your own reflection FGR2</p> <p>Just reflecting as a team, reflecting</p>	<p>I think our daily PitStops help us reflect as a team FGR5</p> <p>PitStops are a good opportunity to reflect on a variety of different things FGR6</p> <p>I think of PitStops as a way of reflecting together FGR7</p> <p>PitStops are a good time for adults to come together FGR7</p>	<p>You go home, relax and all of a sudden you think about it [what happened] FGR2</p> <p>I'm always in my car thinking, why did I say that FGR6</p> <p>I feel my drive home, it's either I should have don this or I shouldn't have done that – I reflect on it for next time FRG1</p> <p>There's times when I'm so passionate about something and I drive home and I am thinking about it FGR1</p> <p>You totally reflect on your day while driving home. I find you reflect a lot on the drive home. Sometimes you have that drive home and you think, how did I even get here because you're constantly reflecting FGR4</p>	<p>Everyone reflects in their own way FGR7</p> <p>People always get stuck on that first bit – what happened, especially if they are reflecting by themselves FGR6</p> <p>One to ones have been really meaningful for us as practitioners to reflect on our individual practice FGR6</p> <p>When I reflect personally [by myself] I do it mentally, I don't write anything down FGR3</p> <p>When I have done the mental reflection, I quite like to jot it down FGR4</p> <p>As soon as I do a personal one [reflection], I'm like, ugh why did you even do that FGR5</p>

	<p>together, having someone giving you that positive reflection on your practice can really pick you up FGR6</p> <p>Sometimes it's about what are you going to do to overcome the barriers...sometimes you just need someone to say, well what are you going to do now FGR7</p> <p>Thinking of reflection individually, but also as a whole, if you need support from your team FGR5</p> <p>Sometimes you just need a prompt from someone else, if you've been thinking negatively about what you have done or criticising yourself FGR7</p> <p>When we reflect as a team, it's, yeah, I'd say it's different, I don't know how to describe it FGR7</p> <p>Reflection helps you work as a team FGR5</p>		<p>In the car home you might have reflected on your day as a whole FGR3</p>	
<p>Questionnaire Responses</p>	<p>We have discussions with the learners- we do this daily [as a way of reflecting] QR1</p> <p>I have conversations with colleagues, posing questions to them to help them reflect QR4</p>	<p>We use daily PitsStops to reflect QR1</p> <p>We would usually have PitStops in the morning so we can reflect, plan and carry the actions out QR1</p>	<p>I reflect at night when I am at home, I feel like that this allows me to reflect on my day in a non-working environment QR8</p> <p>I reflect at the end of my working day and take stock of everything QR13</p>	

	<p>Engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues QR6</p> <p>I reflect on how something went, this is sometimes just a brief discussion with colleagues QR5</p> <p>Talking with colleagues [is a reflective technique] QR15</p>	<p>Daily PitStops [are used as a reflective technique] QR4</p> <p>We aim to reflect more regularly through the day using daily PitStops QR10</p> <p>[I reflect] during daily PitStops QR14</p>	<p>I reflect anytime, but more often towards the end of the day QR11</p> <p>I'm most likely to reflect at the end of the day QR10</p> <p>At the end of my shift, I think about my day as soon as it's over QR9</p> <p>I reflect at night when I am at home QR8</p> <p>When I finish my work shift, I think of the days events QR5</p> <p>If I reflect at the end of the day I can do it in a relaxed environment QR2</p>	
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## Appendix 6: Extract of transcript analysis: Mindset

Extracts from the data illustrating analysis

	Mindset		
	Negative		Positive
	Self-criticism	Mood/mindset & barriers to reflection	
Focus Group Responses	<p>We always beat ourselves up about something (FGR2)</p> <p>I am someone who beats myself up a bit, over something and kind of just thinking about it all the time (FGR2)</p> <p>If you are taught how to reflect effectively, you might have a better outcome rather than beating yourself up because you might beat yourself up about what's been happening and reflect negatively (FGR3)</p> <p>90-95% of the time, my reflection is criticising myself, but only if I'm doing it on my own (FGR5)</p> <p>Depending on the situation, I would probably give myself so much of a hard time rather than focusing on the positive than the negatives</p>	<p>Your mood [is a barrier to reflection] (FGR3)</p> <p>Your mindset [is a barrier to reflection] (FGR4)</p> <p>That's just my mindset in general, I am a natural over thinker (FGR1)</p> <p>If it's something you enjoy, you are going to want to reflect and it won't be such a chore. I think it just depends on everyone's individual mindset (FGR7)</p> <p>If you come in the next day it's good if you have a fresh mindset (FGR7)</p> <p>Your mindset determines the way you reflect (FGR4)</p> <p>Being more positive during</p>	<p>Being more positive during reflection puts you in a better mood (FGR3)</p> <p>If it's something you are passionate about and you care about then I think it will be more natural to reflect (FGR7)</p> <p>As the educators, we benefit from reflection (FGR6)</p> <p>I always look back [on my practice] and go that was a good thing (FGR2)</p> <p>There should be more emphasis on the positives about reflection...and be like let's just look and see how good this has gone (FGR3)</p> <p>Sometimes it's just nice to be, like, let's reflect on how good today has been and what has been so good about it (FGR3)</p> <p>If you are constantly in the process of negatively reflecting, you need something to show how to turn that into a positive (FGR3)</p> <p>A tiny little, positive comment from someone else, can change your mindset totally (FGR)</p>

	<p>(FGR5)</p> <p>Reflecting is probably sometimes giving myself a hard time...I probably in a sense doubt myself (FGR1)</p> <p>Most of the time I'm reflecting, I would say it's because I am being critical of myself (FGR1)</p> <p>If someone is constantly taking the negatives out of a situation then we might not get to the solution (FGR3)</p> <p>You don't want to go home and spend your whole entire time thinking bad and being negative...so a little support on how to reflect would be good (FGR3)</p> <p>Sometimes you just need a little prompt from someone else if you are thinking negatively about what you have done or criticising yourself (FGR7)</p>	<p>reflection puts you in a better mood (FGR3)</p> <p>You might have a different perspective [when reflecting] depending on how you are feeling (FGR3)</p> <p>If you are tired, maybe you see a situation differently, but then you might go home, take some time, feel a bit better and have a different thought (FGR3)</p> <p>If you look back on a situation when you're maybe in a different mood, or however you're feeling, you might reflect on that situation differently and take something different from the situation (FGR3)</p> <p>If you are constantly in the process of negatively reflecting then you need something to show you how to turn that into a positive (FGR3)</p>	
Questionnaire Responses	<p>We should look back and take the positives and negatives from an experience (QR9)</p> <p>Fear of realising you are not perfect (QR8)</p>	<p>It's difficult to be honest with yourself, so this holds back genuine reflection (QR9)</p> <p>Honesty is a barrier to true reflection (QR13)</p>	<p>Always look at what went well (QR10)</p> <p>What went really well that we can try again (QR3)</p> <p>Always consider what went well (QR4)</p>

		Honesty [as a barrier to reflection] (QR15)	
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## Appendix 7: Extract of transcript analysis: Reflective models

Extracts from the data illustrating analysis

	Reflective models		
	Theories		Reflection on practice
	References to reflective processes	Theorists discussed	Reflecting on previous experiences
Focus Group Responses	<p>I look back and take the positives and the negatives from experiences (FGR7)</p> <p>You're constantly looking back (FGR3)</p> <p>I always look back at my practice (FGR2)</p> <p>I think that throughout the day you do mini reflections all the time (FGR3)</p>	<p>(participants did not refer to any reflective theories or models during the focus group)</p>	<p>I look back and take the positives and the negatives from experiences (FGR7)</p> <p>You're constantly looking back (FGR3)</p> <p>I always look back at my practice (FGR2)</p> <p>Think about what went really well and how you can improve and on the other hand think about what didn't go well so you can improve that (FGR7)</p>
Questionnaire Responses	<p>Reflective practice is not a process that is one cycle, but rather it's continuous with no real end (QR6)</p> <p>Not understanding reflective toolkits can be a barrier (QR10)</p>	<p>I am aware of Gibb's reflective model (QR8)</p> <p>Gibbs cycle (QR7)</p> <p>I am aware of the Gibbs reflective model but would like to understand it more to support me in my role. I have carried out some reading surrounding this model</p>	<p>I reflect on how things went, but not always formally (QR3)</p> <p>I reflect at the end of the day, that way I can reflect on all the events in a relaxed environment (QR2)</p> <p>I reflect on practice to support, challenge and understand where I am with personal developments as a practitioner (QR4)</p> <p>I find myself reflecting on practice rather than in practice...I find it easier to reflect on a situation after it has happened (QR6)</p>

		<p>(QR9)</p> <p>How Good is Our ELCC and Realising the Ambition [are reflective models] (QR10)</p> <p>John Dewey's theory and model of experiential learning (QR6)</p> <p>Planning cycle (QR13)</p> <p>Driscoll's - what, so what and now what. (QR2)</p> <p>Familiar with Gibb's reflective cycle (QR3)</p> <p>HGIOELCC, Heath and social care standards, Realising the ambition (QR5)</p>	<p>Your reflect back to see what worked well, what didn't and how could you implement change to make the outcome better (QR8)</p> <p>Looking back helps you highlight exactly what your strengths are and also what things you could improve on (QR9)</p> <p>Reflecting on practice is a way of studying your own experiences to improve the way you work (QR14)</p> <p>I review myself constantly to see what I could have done better (QR2)</p> <p>Reflection is looking back at what you have done and considering things like why you have done it, what went well and what could be better (QR3)</p>
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