

Briefing Paper

What is reflection and reflective practice?

According to Brock (2014, p. 7) reflection and reflective practice play a key role in professionals training and are important values for them. It is used in many different professions, especially education, healthcare and social care, where it is a vital part of their professional practice. The University of Hull (2024) notes that “reflection is a natural activity” and that we all *think* about what we have either done or said or things that wish we could do, which is why reflection is linked with hindsight. As Participatory Methods (no date) explains, reflective practice is an approach that allows a person or a group to reflect on a situation and their actions taken to engage in a process of continuous learning, which then enhances their practice.

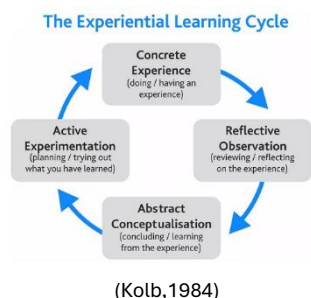
Why is reflective practice important to EY practice?

The Welsh Government (2023) highlights the importance of reflective practice in early childhood play, learning and care, and explains that engaging in reflection allows us to understand our actions and the reasons behind them. Reflective practice also helps us see our strengths and the areas where we can improve. By taking the time to carefully reflect on our work and actions, we can find new ideas and have a better understanding of what we want to achieve. There are plenty of questions we can ask ourselves to benefit our practice, for example, do our actions affect our practice, and if so, how? They also point out that reflective practice should be a purposeful and ongoing process and that by making the time to reflect often we can grow as professionals and improve outcomes for infants and children.

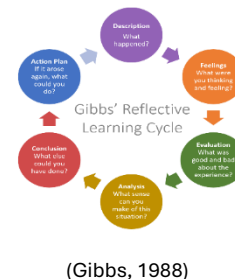
The theory of reflective practice:

The Open University (no date) suggests that the word ‘reflective practice’ comes from philosopher John Dewey and theorist Donald Schon. Dewey (1910, p.6) describes reflective practice as an active process of carefully questioning and evaluating any belief or knowledge by looking closely at the reasons behind it. Dewey also highlighted that reflection gives people foresight in their actions, helping them understand what they are doing and why. However, Schon (1983) proposes a slightly different perspective, suggesting that reflection has two elements to it. One element being “reflection-in-action”, which involves quickly assessing and adjusting your approach whilst engaged in a task. The other element being “reflection-on-action”, which takes place after something has happened, allowing you to revisit the situation, reflect in depth and change it for the future. Both Dewey and Schon’s work led to numerous reflective models being created.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle Model



Gibbs' Reflective Learning Cycle Model



Analysis of models – compare/contrast/pros/cons:

According to Lindon and Trodd (2016 pp. 73-75), Kolb’s created a model that demonstrates the process of experiential learning. The model focuses on four different stages, which some people may find hard to understand due to the difficult language. Those are “concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.” “Concrete experience” is based on an actual experience of an event or situation. The next stage is “reflective observation”, where you take time to reflect on what you did or what has happened. The duration of this part of the cycle depends on the critical thinking skills you possess and how comfortable you are with stepping back from an experience. “Abstract conceptualisation” is the third stage, during this you will analyse your experience and use theories and general knowledge to solve the problem. Lastly is “active experimentation”, which involves applying what you have learnt to similar situations to try and improve the outcome. However, Brock (2014 pp. 16-17) suggests Gibbs’ reflective learning cycle might be a bit simpler to follow as it is made up of 6 stages with simple language. These stages are description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. So firstly, you would describe what happened, next you would describe how it made you feel, then you would reflect on what was good or bad about it, after that you would focus on why it happened, perhaps using research to support you, next you would figure out what you have learnt from the experience and lastly you would think about what you would do different next time. Brock also points out that Kolb’s model can span over days, weeks or months depending on the topic and can include many different things making it more difficult to understand, whereas Gibbs’ model is easier to work around as you describe it, analyse the process and plan your actions for the future. Kolb’s model is based on the idea that we use actual experiences to better our understanding, whereas Gibbs’ model is based on reflecting in the moment and reflecting on action. Both Kolb’s and Gibbs’ models show how observing and reflecting on practice can support a new way of thinking that benefits how we deal with situations in the future.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Kolb’s model helps individuals to understand the process of reflecting during an experience as it is based on the idea that we use actual experiences to enhance our understanding, whereas Gibbs’ model helps individuals to reflect after the experience has taken place as it emphasises reflecting on past actions. Both Kolb’s and Gibbs’ models are beneficial for helping individuals understand their own thinking and their approach to learning. They encourage us to avoid jumping to conclusions and support us in slowing down our thinking process. Both cycles allow you to learn from things you did well or things you may not have done well, and help you plan for better outcomes in the future. Even though reflective cycles can be very beneficial reflecting during or after an experience is not always easy as there could potentially be barriers in the way, for example, not having the time or support to reflect effectively.

Reference List

Brock, A. (2014) *The Early Years Reflective Practice Handbook*. London: Routledge.

Dewey, J. (1910) *How we think*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co.

Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. London: Further Education Unit.

Kolb, D.A. (1984) *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. London: Prentice-Hall.

Lindon, J. and Trodd, L. (2016) *Reflective practice and early years professionalism*. 3rd edn. London: Hodder Education.

Participatory Methods (no date) *Reflective Practice*. Available at: <https://www.participatorymethods.org/method/reflective-practice> (Accessed: 20 October 2024).

Schon, D. (1983) *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London, Temple Smith.

The Open University (no date) *Learning to teach: becoming a reflective practitioner*. Available at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/learning-teach-becoming-reflective-practitioner/content-section-2.1> (Accessed: 20 October 2024).

University of Hull (2024) *Reflection Writing: Introduction*. Available at: <https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/reflectivewriting/reflection1> (Accessed: 20 October 2024).

Welsh Government (2023) *Early childhood play, learning and care: Reflective practice toolkit*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/a8d10028-25ae-4d94-ad18-0247286ce822/early-childhood-play-learning-and-care-reflective-practice-toolkit-v1.pdf> (Accessed: 20 October 2024).