

**What is reflective practice?**

According to Appleby and Andrew (2011) reflective practice is 'a never ending learning journey'. Reflective practice is looking back over what has been done, evaluating it and then looking at how it can be done better next time and then the process starts again. In the words of Lindon and Trodd (2016) 'the process of serious thought and constructive analysis of current practice, leading to an informed judgement about strengths and considered plans for change that will bring about improvements'. Reflective practice is not new, although it is discussed and used much more in current times. According to Brook (2015) reflective practice dates back to the Greek Philosophers – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In professional practice, all professionals are expected to do reflective practice to reflect on and in their professional practice. Moon (2004) agrees that reflection is a very important element of professional practice. It enables the practitioner to continually develop and to be aware of themselves and others whilst striving to improve. Reflective practice improves the quality of practice delivered and therefore improves outcomes.

**Reflective questioning**

According to Hallet (2004) reflective questioning is very important and there are many questions a practitioner can ask oneself when reflecting. Examples of these are: How will the setting be evaluated? What resources are needed? What worked well? What did not work so well? What could be done to improve? Why does this improvement need doing? How will this improvement be done? Who can be involved with this improvement? Where is there information to help with doing this improvement? Where can be visited to see what other practitioners are doing? What can be read to find out information about this? Who are the experts in this field? Back to the first question, which is how will the setting be evaluated? The questions revolve and do not need to be done in a particular order.

**What is involved in being a reflective practice practitioner?**

The main challenge is to understand what is involved and what is meant by reflective practice. Reflection involves thinking about the experiences and how they worked well or failed to work and what can be done differently next time, understanding any problems and trying out new ways. Reflective learning is implying a 'sense of open exploration' to work out what something is or to investigate more about it (Moon, 2008). Askew and Carnell (1998) studied the purpose of learning through doing. Reflective thinking includes critical thinking which is 'active and deliberate' (Moon, 2008), creative thinking, reflection in action and on action (Schon, 1983) 'focusing close attention upon one's own actions' and the way 'I am experienced and perceived by others' (Bolton, 2005). Reflective writing is a way of reflective thinking, expression and representation for more reflective thinking. Reflective action shows and is a result of the other processes. Meta-reflection makes the whole process of reflection clear and precise. Hallet (2004) states that in order to do reflective practice, practitioners need to think about and evaluate their actions by asking questions, making connections, looking for patterns, linking experience and practice with theory, identifying knowledge, understanding and skills and making recommendations for modifications to practice. According to Rankin and Butler (2011) reflection is vital, the key to recognise what has been comprehended, and 'our own values as practitioners will affect how we approach reflective enquiry'.

**Why is reflective practice important within the early years?**

Early years practitioners are expected to consider and reflect on how they engage with the children who attend together with their families. Each child deserves the best experience, it is up to the early years practitioners to deliver this, and then to reflect and change if necessary how they would do something next time. Reed and Canning (2010) believe that the foundation of the work of an early years practitioner is reflecting on practice. They have to reflect and examine the ways they engage with children and their families. Brookfield (1995) suggests that learners are reflecting when they offer evaluations about their own encounters. Schon (1983) speaks of reflective practice being about thinking, contemplating, using intuition, insight and artistry, possibly using emotions together with knowledge and understanding. Change is always occurring in the early years sector so practitioners need to be willing to be open to change and amend practice going forward to move with the current times. Instead of a 'technician' or learner reliant on 'unreflective induction' (Claxton, 2003), the practitioner is seen as being the 'artist' and reflective practice as the art. The experience of the practitioner, their response to the reflective practice and the plan for the way forward is helpful to other practitioners who can learn from it and give advice so the reflective practice benefits all involved. The children will benefit from this, which is the whole purpose of the reflective practice.

**Reflective practice can improve quality in early years**

Reflective practice in early years is important and communication between the professionals is paramount. Ridler (2002) observed the way teachers taught children aged 5 years in a lesson to develop their mathematics skills and the outcome was that the children and their teachers need to be 'talking about the same thing'. There is no point continuing if they are not as the children will not learn anything from the experience if they do not understand. Looking at all of the above each can be used in practice in the early Years. All are useful ways of looking at reflective practice and depending on what experiences are, being considered could possibly depend on which model of reflective practice could be used. In early years, settings whether it be school or childcare many children of different ages and abilities attend and all have different likes, dislikes and needs. Using reflective practice should be used almost without thinking; it should be part of each experience for the child so that next time can be even better whether it be for the same children or different children. In other words in professional practice, practitioners are constantly learning and sharing their experience.

**How reflective practice can support the development of a professional**

Reflective practice is ongoing and a major part of the role of a professional practitioner. Reflecting, considering, discussing, and changing ways for the better so the next time the experience is delivered it is even better than the last time. Doing this the professional is continually developing and is always up to date with current times. Using theories and models such as those described above which others have used and tried before them are a good tool for professionals to use and these enhance their development. Reflective practice gives the chance to take a look at the role of practitioner and what sort of practice they are promoting. This enables one to think about the kind of practitioner they are and would like to be, think about how others will perceive one including colleagues, parents/carers and children and think about how one would like others to see one.

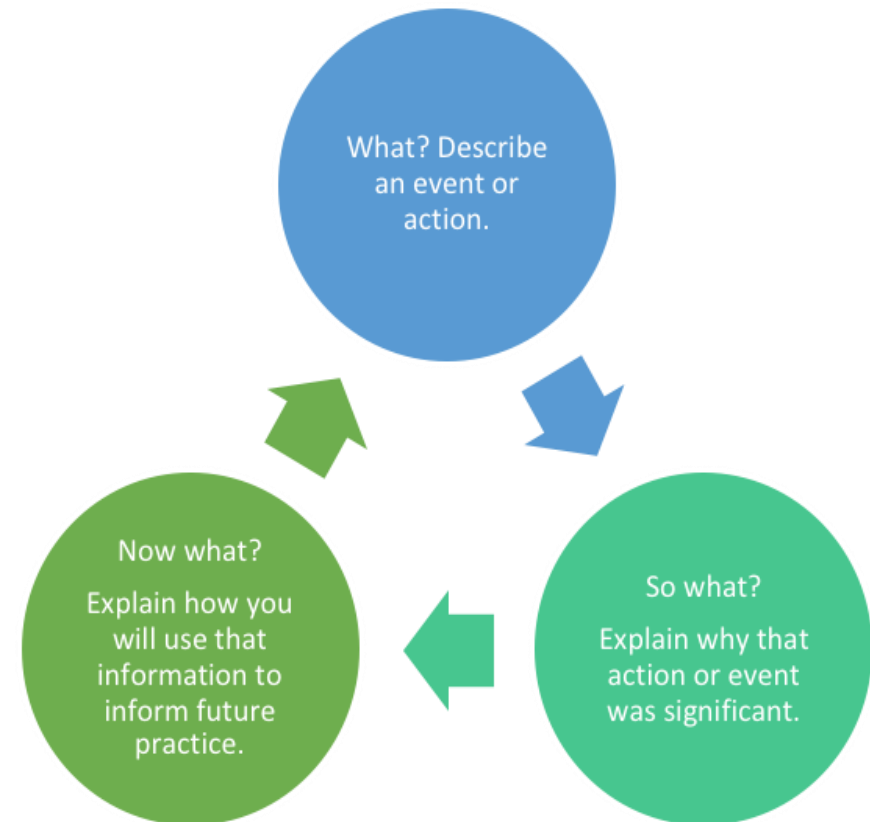


Reflective model according to Kolb

### Theoretical frameworks and models to enable the application of the reflective practice in the early years

Bradbury *et al* (2010) believe that it is crucial to re-examine the tasks following reflection and reflective practice and to consider the pace of work and professional identity. They also believe that more criticality and critical practice is necessary by using the thoughts and ideas of Schon (1983) and other theorists. There are different models of reflection and they have different numbers of stages. Gibbs (1988) has six stages, Jasper (2013) has three stages, Kolb (1984) has four stages, Schon (1983) has two stages and Driscoll has three stages. All are aiming for the same outcome but in slightly different approaches. Gibbs (1988) also developed a reflective cycle. It was aimed to give structure to future learning from previous experiences as to what went well and what could be improved on. It has six stages. Firstly, description of the actual experience that has taken place. Secondly feelings and thoughts about how the actual experience went. Thirdly, an evaluation of the actual experience, considering the positives and the negatives followed by an analysis to understand what went on. Next is the conclusion about what was actually learned and how things could be done differently next time. Finally an action plan as to how the experience could be done in the future taking into account what has been thought and discussed so that similar experiences can be done differently in the future to offer the best experiences and then it all begins again with the description of what has taken place. ERA Cycle is a simple framework designed by Jasper (2013) and is based around building understanding from experience. It feeds from learning through reflection forward into future experiences. It contains only three stages that are Experience, Reflection and Action. It begins with an experience, or something that has happened whether it be a positive or negative experience. Then the experience is reflected on, as to what has happened. Then the result as to what to do because of the experience, which is the action, then the process begins again. Kolb (1984) – The model is referred to as 'experiential learning', which is the experience, reviewing the experience, analysing it and then evaluating in a systematic way in the different stages. Then after the process has been completed, the new experiences will start the cycle again. There are four parts to the learning cycle of David Kolb – Concrete experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract conceptualisation or conceptualising and Active experimentation. Kolb states that the model can be started at any point and is an active process of learning. Concrete evidence can be a brand new experience or an experience that has already happened but been reimagined. Every child needs take part in the activity provided as the key to the child learning is being involved in it. Reflective observation is the part of the cycle where the experience is looked back over and then thought given to how it could have been done better. Abstract conceptualisation is reflecting to find new ways or modifications to what has already been learnt before starting the learning cycle again. Active experimentation is the testing stage of the cycle. This time it is returning to do the experience but with the idea of using the conclusions from reflecting in the new experiences. This can be applied in the early years setting for all activities for learners returning to do an activity with the main goal of applying their outcomes from the reflective practice to the new experiences. Schon (1983) has the theory of Reflection in action and Reflection on action. Reflection in action is looking at the way something is happening as it is actually happening and the experience is taking place and if it needs to be changed then decide how and change the way it is being done then and there. However, reflection on action is looking back on what has happened during an experience, thinking about how the experience went and what needs changing for the next time the experience is carried out. Driscoll (1994, 2007) has a model of reflection with three stages. Firstly describing an experience, secondly discussing why that experience was significant and finally how using the outcomes from the discussion can be put into practice for future experiences. All of these theories are effective and can be used when carrying out reflective practice to develop and enhance activities and experiences in the early years. What works for one person will not necessarily work for another or may work for one activity and experience but not so well for another so it is good to be aware of them all and apply to reflective practice where appropriate.

Model of Reflection according to Driscoll



### Conclusion

Reflective practice on a daily basis, to include thoughts and actions of previous experiences, reflective conversations and reflective questioning is essential for the role of the early years practitioner. Thinking about the models of the theorists together with discussions and taking advice from other more experienced practitioners, the children will be provided with experiences that are more beneficial and better suited to their individual needs.

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