

1. What does it mean to reflect and what is reflective practice?

As supported by the University of Edinburgh (no date) reflection can be described as a way an individual scrutinizes themselves, their actions, and their reactions. Reflecting can be used to give individuals an improved insight into their professional practice by analyzing aspects of their workplace and role.

Zeichner and Liston (2013) suggest that reflective practice is a means to examine a situation that may have occurred and further openly discuss the outcome with other professionals, colleagues, or parents. Allowing practitioners, the ability to critically analyse their own practice individually and to aspire for improved future outcomes and further professional development.

3. Barriers of Reflection

Pacey (2016) also suggests there can often be obstacles to overcome with regard to reflective practice. This might include, a lack of time, or uncertainty on how to implement the lessons you have learned from reflection. Thompson and Thompson (2023) raise another barrier to the concept of reflective practice, this being failing leadership. In order for reflective practice to be seen as a compulsory expectation rather than an optional task, those in leadership roles are advised to express the significance of reflecting on previous work experiences to their organisations.

The University of Cambridge (no date) believes that one of reflections biggest barriers is oneself. To be reflective can often require a large amount of self-perception, this can be unpleasant for some individuals, especially those who are only beginning their professional reflection journey. Davis and Ryder (2016) express that although reflective practice can benefit professional practice, it is also accompanied by potential risks. They further explain that deep reflection can make practitioners feel inexperienced and inept. Leading to potential lack of belief in oneself. This can affect morale for the individual themselves, colleagues, and the children within the practice.

2. Reflective Practice in the Early Years

The term ‘reflective practice’ was developed through the work of Donald Schon (1893). Fook (2015) explains that reflective practice appears to be more focused on professional practice, however, it occurs and is applicable in every aspect of day-to-day life. As suggested by Lindon and Todd (2016) reflective practice plays a key role in building upon and supporting an early years setting that is flexible, equipped for new challenges, and reliable. Pacey (2016) describes reflective practice as a process of analysing and considering a practitioner’s current way of teaching, learning, and making appropriate changes to improve their practice. Play Wales (2018) believes that if practice is not consistently developing then practitioners are actively ignoring the requirements of the children in their care, whilst also limiting their own professional capabilities.

As supported by Hargreaves and Page (2013) it is suggested that there are many reasons as to why a professional practitioner is encouraged to reflect, one of these reasons being that it is thought that reflection can assist in moving difficult situations forward, assisting in a quick and positive resolution. According to Brock (2014), it is within the responsibility of professional practitioners to ensure high-quality care and enriching learning experiences are offered to all children. Thompson and Thompson (2023) believe that applying reflection to practice can provide practitioners with increased self-awareness, and allow them to detect their own professional weaknesses, ensuring improvements are made efficiently. Alongside this Ash and D’Auria (2016) suggests that the lessons that are learned from reflecting can provide practitioners with the appropriate resources to maintain and improve high-quality practice.

As believed by Brock (2015), reflective practice is not exclusively intellectual and extended reflection can allow practitioners to gain a feeling of self-awareness in their own emotional well-being. This can be described as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise, review and manage one’s own emotions. As supported by Mental Health America (no date) emotional intelligence comprises of five personal characteristics, these are, self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and self-motivation. Gill’s (2014) research demonstrated that reflective practice facilitated and enhanced numerous practitioners’ emotional intelligence skills, Bleakley *et al.* (2020) further explains that the way an educator is able to manage their own emotional intelligence relates to what kind of practitioner they are, their way of practice and their professional abilities. It is explained by Shauna *et al.* (2017) that emotional intelligence skills impact our memory, attention, and learning, along with our ability to create and strengthen relationships, all of which are qualities that help construct professional educators.

4. How to reflect

The University of Cambridge (2021) suggests that there are no set rules in which one is 'supposed to' reflect, however, it is considered to be most useful when discussed with colleagues. Pacey (2016) suggests that discussing your practice, concerns and overall reflection with fellow practitioners can be beneficial as this demonstrates that an individual is open to sharing and receiving new ideas, solutions, and support from one another.

Whalley (2017) suggests that open communication and reflection with parents can be beneficial for both parties as it allows discoveries from home and within settings to be combined, enabling action plans to be put in place to best support each child individually. Hallet (2013) proposes that by reflecting with families, children, and colleagues, professional practitioners are able to give efficient feedback, whilst also receiving feedback confidently to improve their way of practice. Along with this, practitioners can improve their problem-solving skills, aspiring for continuous professional development. As suggested by Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2016) by reflecting with families, children, and colleagues, practitioners are able to assess and identify ways to provide high quality inclusive, and responsive care, support, and service.

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2016) also offers insight into ways in which an educator can strategize for successful reflection sessions. For example, establishing a routine that provides practitioners with the time that is needed for reflection to occur regularly. This could mean setting time aside at the end of the day to record their reflections in a diary. According to Moon (2013) some practitioners may find written reflective account forms to be helpful as this enables an individual to go through a reflective model step by step and log any details regarding the experiences you are reflecting upon. Noting down past reflections can be useful for future incidents as it can remind an individual of lessons learnt and how one should approach them differently.

5. Donald Schon's Theory

When observing professional reflective practice, Schon (1993) established two types of reflection, these being, reflection **on** action and reflection **in** action. As suggested by Iriss (no date) reflection **in** action can frequently be described as 'thinking on our feet' and takes place whilst an activity or action is taking place. Meierdirk (2017) explains that Schon's theory suggests that when a practitioner reflects in action, they are reflecting on unexpected situations, leading to an in-the-moment implementation of experimentations to discover a newfound understanding and alteration to a situation.

Edwards (2017) describes Reflection **on** action as an individual that reflects on an experience after it has occurred. Oppositely to reflection **in** action, Schon's theory on reflection on action shares the idea that when professional practitioners reflect after an experience, they are more than likely able to explore the experience. This allows an individual to really ask the questions such as, 'What happened, 'Why did it happen', and 'What could I have done to change the outcome?', this cycle of reflections enables practitioners to analyse ulterior ways in which they could improve upon their practice. Schon also introduced the term 'tacit knowledge', as explained by LSE (No date) tacit knowledge means knowledge which an individual may possess but may not be able to articulate correctly. MA Education (2015) adds to this by describing tacit knowledge as practitioners' concealed ideas that assist us on providing quality care to children, however, practitioners are encouraged to find ways to discuss these ideas so that new concepts are developed and refined, leading to better practice and policy making.

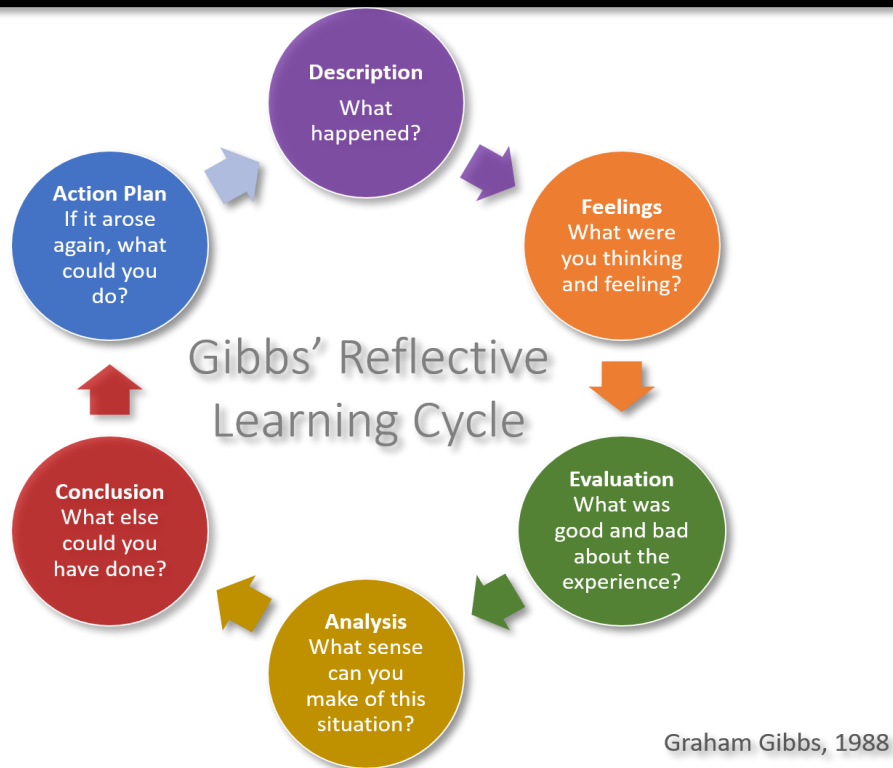
6a. Reflective Models

As stated by Moon (2013) there are numerous models of reflection, that share similar stages throughout, however, some models may have more stages than others. As supported by The University of Edinburgh (2020) one of the most common models of reflection used by practitioners is Gibbs' model of reflection. This model was developed by Graham Gibbs in 1988 to enhance structure around learning experiences. It includes 6 stages, including a **description** of an experience, **feelings**, and thoughts about the experience, **evaluation** of the experience (positive and negative), **analysis** to understand the experience, a **conclusion** regarding what you have learned and what you could have done differently, and finally, an **action plan** for how you would approach a similar situation in the future. Oviawe's (2020) research revealed that the application of Gibbs' reflection cycle increased student-teachers' opinions toward teaching practice and enabled them to acquire a better understanding of the teaching profession. Oviawe (2020) also states that it may be beneficial to implement more reflection throughout teaching practices as it allows students to better understand what they did right or wrong, and how this can be improved in the future to nurture their teaching capabilities. Alongside this, Markkanen *et al.* (2020) explain how their research determined that Gibbs' reflection cycle was helpful to those who used the model as a framework for structuring the reflection process.

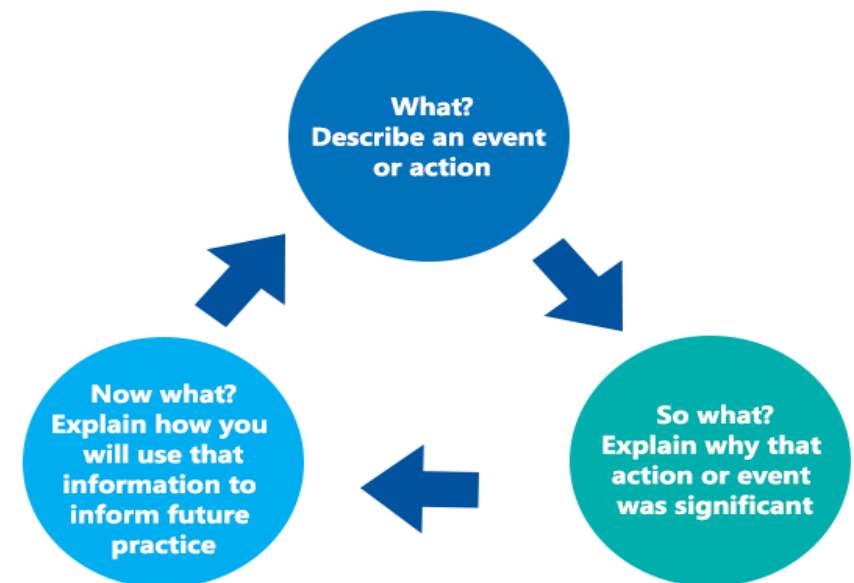
6b. Reflective Models Continued

Conversely to Gibbs' reflection cycle, as suggested by Nursing Answers (2018), Driscoll's model of reflection offers a simplified version of the reflection process. As stated by The University of Nottingham (No date) this model was constructed by Driscoll during the years of 1994, 2004, and 2007. This model is based around three main questions, these are, what, so what, and now what? There are a set of questions for each three stages which enables an individual to evaluate an experience in depth.

Although reflective models have been proven to assist professionals in the reflective process, as stated by The University of Cambridge (No date) all models are accompanied by a list of both pros and cons. For example, opposed to Driscoll's model of reflection, Gibbs' reflection cycle has twice the number of stages, indicating this structure may take a practitioner more time to navigate through. As well as this, due to Driscoll's model of reflection being a smaller-scaled model, the downside is that it can be harder to work through and may end up feeling like a rushed process. Overall, although Gibbs' reflection cycle may take longer, it is likely that it can enable practitioners to fully explore how they felt throughout an experience, often meaning they take away a more valued lesson. As supported by Davis and Ryder (2016) while there are many reflective models to assist in an individual's reflective process, every practitioner will eventually find a model or tool that works best for them and are advised against following a guide of reflection just for the sake of doing so. Furthermore, they support the idea of reflecting when prompted by professional communication, incidents that arise within practice, or creating and planning activities.



Martin, H. (2021) Gibbs' Reflective Learning Cycle



NursingAnswers.Net. (2018) Driscoll's Model of Reflection

