

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a never-ending 'learning journey' involving personal and professional qualities and attributes that merge as the individual assumes ownership of thinking processes and actions and develops a personal sense of responsibility for the 'outcomes for children' as individuals and as part of a 'community of practice'. Wenger (1998, quoted in Reed and Canning, 2010, pg. 9). Being reflective involves critically analysing your own practice and looking at what is good and what needs improving. This enables you to be able to set personal targets and to improve future practice (Reed and Canning, 2010, pg. 13). It can also be useful when you have had more challenging experiences; helping you to process and learn from them (Hcpc, 2021).

Models of Reflection

There are numerous ways in which practitioners might reflect on their practice using different models such as Kolb's (1994) experiential learning cycle, Gibbs (1998) reflective cycle and Driscoll's (1990) What model. Reflectors find the existence of such models useful as they start learning how to reflect. Their model of choice will allow them to work systematically through the different aspects of their experience, bringing into consciousness their thoughts, feelings, assumptions and prejudices. (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, pg 108).

Schon's Theory of reflective practice

Donald Schon emphasises the role of reflection within the learning process. Schon identified two types of reflection: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action, sometimes described as 'thinking on our feet', is the process that allows professionals to reshape the situation or activity on which they are working while it is unfolding. It is generally associated with the experience of surprise: Schon suggests that, by "reflecting-in-action", professionals reflect on unexpected experiences and conduct 'experiments' which serve to generate both a new understanding of the experience and a change in the situation.

Reflection-on-action involves reflecting on an experience, situation or phenomenon *after* it has occurred. When professionals "reflect-on-action" they explore what happened in that particular situation, why they acted as they did, whether they could have acted differently, and so on.

Reflection-on-action is often associated with reflective writing in which professionals reflect on their experiences and examine alternative ways to improve their practice (Iriss, N,D). Tan (2020) argues that two main weaknesses of Schon's approach to reflective practice are the presupposition of self-protected individualism, and an insufficient attention to ethical concerns. Convey (2006) also criticises Schon's ideas by stating that The busyness of the classroom is marked by its continuity and consequence—it becomes difficult to separate events into individual cases that do not have repercussions either for the individual teacher or learner or for those with whom these individuals interact. Thus there is a particular problem of interpretation for teachers considering 'reflection-in-action'. Convey (2006, pg 199-200) also states that Schon lacked appropriate practical examples from teaching.

Driscoll's Model

Cambridge Libraries (N,D) published Driscoll's model. Driscoll based his model on 3 questions that were asked by Terry Borton in the 1970s. These include, What? So what? And Now what? It states that if we ask ourselves these three simple questions, we can begin to analyse and learn from our experiences. Firstly, we should describe what the situation or experience was to set it in context. Giving us a clear idea of what we are dealing with. We should then reflect on the experience by asking 'so what?'. Trying to reflect on what we learnt as a result of the experience. The final stage asks us to think about the action we will take as a result of this reflection. Driscoll connected these three stem questions to the stages of an experience learning cycle, and then added trigger questions that must be answered to complete the reflection cycle. The three questions were developed in 1994, 2000 and 2007. The John Driscoll Model of Reflection is one of the simplest models of reflection. By answering these three questions, you can start to analyse experiences and learn from these. The first stage is 'What?'. In this stage the following questions could be asked; what exactly happened? What did you do? Was someone else involved? Was it a good experience, bad experience or both? Why?

The 'So what?' stage of the model could be guided by questions like; How did you feel at that specific moment? How did you react? Why did you react this way? Did you feel the same about the situation then as you do now? Were you experiencing a conflict with your personal values? Do you think past situations have influenced your experience during this situation? Who else was involved? How did they feel? And how did they react? And why did they react this way?

Finally, questions that will conduct the 'Now what?' stage of the model could include; What have you learnt from reflecting on this situation/experience/incident? Could you have prevented negative outcomes? And how could you have done so? What would you do differently if a similar situation were to occur in the future? What could you do to better prepare yourself for this? Where did it go wrong last time and what will you focus on now? (Nursing Answers, 2018).



Source: UCD Teaching & Learning (N,D)

Kolb's Model

Kolb published his model in 1984. Kolb's model involves four stages: Concrete experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and active experimentation. According to McPheat (2019), effective learning can be seen when the learner progresses through the cycle. The learner can also enter the cycle at any stage of the cycle with logical sequence. McPheat goes on to explain each stage and states that the first stage of concrete experience is where the learner encounters a new experience or reinterprets an existing experience. This could be where the learner uncovers a new task that they have not seen before. Reflective observation is in the next stage. Here, the learner reflects on the experience on a personal basis. This is followed by the next stage, abstract conceptualisation. This is where learners form new ideas or modify current ones based on the previous reflections made in the observation stage. Finally there is the active experimentation stage, where learners apply the new ideas to their surroundings.

Cherry (2020) argues that The experiential learning theory does not sufficiently address the role that non-reflective experience plays in the learning process. Cherry further argues that while the theory is good at analysing how learning occurs for individuals, it does not look at the learning that takes place in larger social groups.

Nichola (2016) also criticises Kolb's reflective cycle and states that it does not have the number or depth of probing questions as other models.

Gibb's Model

Professor Graham Gibbs published his Reflective Cycle in 1988. It's particularly useful for helping people learn from situations that they experience regularly, especially when these don't go well.

Gibbs' reflective cycle consists of 6 stages; Description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusions and action.

Description is as simple as it sounds. Describing the situation in detail and asking questions like; when and where did this happen? Why were you there? Who else was there? What happened? What did you do/ what did other people do? And what was the result of the situation? The second stage of the model is feelings. This entails acknowledging what feelings were thought and felt during the experience. Questions to guide this stage could be; what did you feel before this situation took place? What did you feel while this situation took place? What do you think other people felt during this situation? What did you feel after the situation? What do you think about the situation now? And what do you think other people will feel about the situation now?

Following is Evaluation and Analysis. Both very similar stages encourage you to look objectively at what approaches worked and which ones didn't.

Questions that can be asked at this stage can be; what was positive about this situation? What was negative? What went well? What didn't go so well? What did you and other people do to contribute to the situation (either positively or negatively)?

Next is the conclusion. Once the evaluation is complete, conclusions can be drawn. Using the information that has been gathered the following questions can be asked; How could this have been a more positive experience for everyone involved? If you were faced with the same situation again, what would you do differently? What skills do you need to develop, so that you can handle this type of situation better?

Finally, the last stage is action. You should now have some possible actions to take to deal with similar situations more effectively in the future. In this stage, a plan needs to be made.

Once all aspects of the plan have been identified, there needs to be commitment to them (MindTools, N,D).

How reflective practice is beneficial

Reflective practice supports your development as a professional. According to Conway (N,D) there are multiple ways in which you can develop through reflective practice. Firstly, It helps in increasing self-awareness. Self-awareness is a primary component of emotional intelligence which helps in developing a better understanding of others.

Secondly, reflective practice helps you to develop creative thinking skills. It also encourages an individual's active engagement during work processes.

Teachkloud (2019) claims that reflection improves practice as it firstly helps overcome Barriers. By reflecting on practice, practitioners are able to identify barriers and take the necessary steps to overcome them. Secondly, Reflecting on practice forces you to stop, think and then act. Through this process of reflection, practitioners find new ways to encourage children's development.

Additionally, Reflection is also an effective problem-solving exercise. Through questioning methodology or previously held assumptions with a focus to implement changes based on your findings, practitioners become more flexible in their approach which benefits children at their age and stage of development. Finally, reflective practice offers the chance for self-assessment, and also appreciation of children's abilities and triumphs. It is not just about looking at what could go or did go wrong but is an amazing opportunity to identify children's strengths and celebrate these

Criticisms of Gibb's Model

Fallin (2021) argues criticisms of Gibbs' reflective cycle. These include; The reflective cycle is boring due to it being six stages. Additionally, the reflective cycle fails to draw connections. Without linking the experience being reflected upon to other events, there is a missed opportunity to demonstrate depth. Finally, Fallin argues that the reflective cycle focuses too much on the reflector. While reflection is a highly individualistic thing, most approaches to it consider there are others. However, Gibbs fails to move beyond analysis of self. This can make reflections self-serving as opposed to individually useful.

Smith (2021) also supports that there are criticisms of Gibbs reflective cycle. He states that, depending on the individual, reflections with the Gibbs Cycle may be superficial, not deep. This will affect the potential for personal or collective development. However, he does point out advantages to Gibbs Reflective cycle such as it being easy to understand and use, that it helps you develop more balanced and accurate judgement and that it allows you to learn over time, based on your experiences.

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