

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is seen as a way to gain insight into one's professional practice. It involves analysing past work and learning from it, (hcpc, 2021). An example of reflective practice can be looking back to an experience and picking out what went well and what did not go so well, analysing those points and deciding where to improve. By challenging oneself, it allows room for growth into professional practice. Reflection can be done as a solo project or as a group. This is known as collaboration reflection. Reflection can be used as an opportunity to gain new information on a certain matter and/or topic. Reflection is individual to each person with individual experiences, but all can be analysed and learnt upon, (U.O.C, no date).

Reflective practice is applied to many aspects in early years practice. These being, teaching, planning, assessing and communicating to both children and adults, (L.S, 2023). According to Lauren Toole, reflective practice is important for early years because reflecting on experiences with young children can give a deeper understanding as to how children learn and behave. The knowledge gained from the reflection can be used as a tool to create more "effective learning experiences". Primed decisions can be identified and chosen leading to improvement to the practice, (Showcase Training, 2023). Some examples of reflection can be journaling and peer observation. By reflecting in early years practice it help to support the individual needs of a child. Similar to Lauren Toole's opinion, highlighting key areas in practice can help a practitioner to understand and respond to diverse needs, (Zero To Three, 2024). Reflective practice enables a practitioner to develop a critical understanding of different practices and learn from each experience. Collaborative reflection can be used in a setting. This can lead to effective and beneficial communication between practitioners. This is important because it can lead to better outcomes which will benefit the young children, (Kathy Brodie, 2025),

One of the most influential figures behind the reflection practice theory is Donald Schön. Schön first introduced his theory in his 1982 book, "The Reflective Practitioner". Throughout the book he identifies three different components of reflection. These being knowledge in action, reflection in action and reflection on action. Knowledge in action is the skills and intelligence previously learnt and applying them to tasks at hand. Reflection in action can be described as acting in the moment, for example when teaching a class and having to make a critical decision in that moment. Reflection on action is considered to be analysing an experience after it has happened. Picking out situations that can be improved upon, (Lara Gorden, 2025). Another theory of reflective practice was acknowledged by John Dewey. His theory highlights that it is not just about the addition of new information but the continuing action of reflecting and learning upon the new information gained. The timeline of reflection starts off with the unknowing of a situation and ends with understanding. Dewey has a strong focus upon

the emphasis of experience and continuous learning in order to be able to develop as a practitioner. Dewey stated reflection as a development of analysing experiences and applying the information learnt to make more enhanced decisions in the future. His theory allows practitioners to think critically about their actions. This is similar to Schön's identification of reflection in action. Dewey's reflective cycle is made up of three key systems, critical examination, problem solving and continuous improvement, (T.I, 2024). Kolb's theory is also similar to Schön and Dewey. Kolb's reflective model is known as experiential learning. Linked to Schön and Dewey, this theory highlights the importance of experience in learning. His cycle is made up of experience, analysis and evaluation. Once these steps were completed it allowed room for new experiences to be made which would lead to more cycles of reflection, (Dr Nicole Brown, no date).

Kolb's reflective practice cycle is seen to be a circular process which has a continuous flow which is carried out in four stages. Its focus is on learning through experiences and reflecting upon them. The stages in which make up Kolb's theory are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Kolb's theory is mainly focused on the cognitive process of reflection. Emotions are not strongly mentioned throughout. Actions are highlighted in Kolb's theory and are seen as a beneficial way to learn and gain new information. Kolb's theory can be used in different situations and aspects.

Gibbs reflective practice is seen more as a step-by-step process which emphasises reflective thinking on emotional responses and actions. Gibbs reflective practice is made up of six stages. The stages being description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan. Compared to Kolb's reflective cycle, Gibbs theory has a stronger emotional aspect, highlighting feelings and emotional responses. Similar to Kolb's theory, Gibbs reflective practice is also based upon actions. Unlike Kolb's theory, this reflective practice is a more fixed structure which offers less flexibility to other situations.

Both Gibbs and Kolb show a valuable reflection process. However, their differences are shown upon how they go through their process. Gibbs focuses on emotions and feelings whereas Kolb is more focused on experimental learning. Kolb's theory would suit collaborative reflection more than it would suit individual reflection. Gibbs theory would suit individual reflection, (Owen Williams, 2017).

Pros of Kolb's cycle can be how it is easy to understand, and it is suited for experimental learning in educational settings. Cons can be how it may not be shown with enough detail to carry out a thorough reflection and how it would not be best suited for an individual reflection.

Pros of Gibbs cycle can be how it provides more detail and structure and how it includes feelings and emotions although on the other hand a con to this style of reflection can be how it can have the potential to be time consuming and possibly too complex for certain situations.

In conclusion, reflection is a strong tool for professional growth, helping practitioners improve their teaching, knowledge and communication. Theorists such as, Schön, Kolb and Gibbs all offer different valuable frameworks each with their own strengths.