
The significance of reflection to facilitate professional development in the early years workforce

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explain to others what reflective practice is and the importance of reflection in early years in order to aid professional development. This paper will look at different reflective cycles from theorists and models and explain the difference in each and how they are useful. Reflection is the process of making a conscious effort, a purposeful effort to think about an activity or incident. Then consider the positive outcome and what might have been challenging before making an appropriate plan of action to enhance the positive and improve on the challenges by considering what can be done differently (Royal College of Nursing, 2021)

Reflection and Professional Practice

Reflection is for anyone, it is a key skill for individuals to have. It can be important though for researchers as they are working with the restriction of current knowledge leading to them carrying out experiments to gather new knowledge. Reflection would come from researchers documenting their expectations and predictions from known knowledge then using reflection to analyse their own experiments to see if their predictions are true (Joris, J *et al* (2016)). Joris, J *et al* (2016) also talks about how reflection can help with studying. By reflecting it can indicate someone's strong and weak points. Reflections provides a clear viewpoint of where they are already succeeding, excelling and where they need to improve and develop further.

Reflection can be useful as it provides individuals with the opportunity to explore and think about their experiences. From this they are able to form new understandings.



Reflection is a useful tool to develop skills and enhance what is already working well. Not only does reflection enhance what is working well but it also allows the individual to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of their experience, to then make a plan for how they can make it better next time. (Boundaries of adult learning, 1996, pg 33)

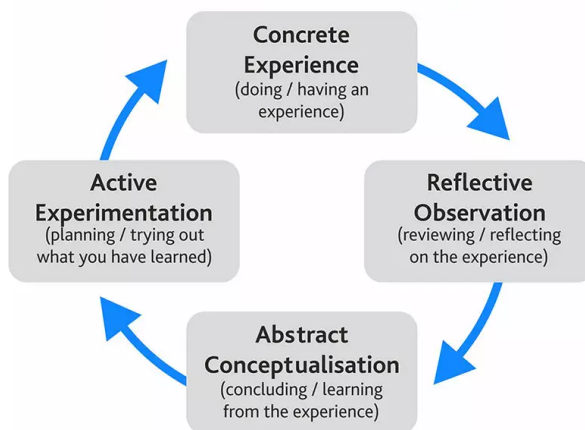
From a scientific point theory is something that is well explained and has evidence to support or to prove what is being said (American Museum of Natural History, 2021) The theory of reflection for instance is explaining to the reader an interpretation of what reflection by explaining individuals can look back upon themselves, their actions and experiences and using the process of analysis and evaluation to determine what was successful and what changes they can make to improve. A model is a structured guide on how to achieve something. For example, a model of reflection is a guide or diagram someone can have a clearer, visual understanding on how they can achieve the process of reflection.

One example for a theory of reflection comes from Donald Schön. Schön believes there are two types of reflection these are 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. In his book (The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action, 2016) he talks about 'reflection in action' and how people within their job roles may know more than they can say and talk about, they display a knowledge, 'knowing-in-practice'. This is known as tacit knowledge, tacit is your own intuition. When Schön says 'Reflection -in-action' he is talking about reflecting in the moment. This could be when something is going wrong, if someone is nervous before something new they will think about it and find a solution to solve their issue. 'Reflection-on-action' would be the process someone would carry out afterwards, they would turn the experience into knowledge, pinpoint what went well and what did not go so well by asking questions. (Royal college of Nursing, 2021). These questions could be 'what are the strengths?', 'what are the weaknesses?', 'what problems can be rectified and what is the solution?'. (The open university, 2021).

Examples of reflective models would be the works of Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988), and the works of Atkins and Murphy (1994). Kolb's learning cycle consists of four stages starting

with the experience or activity. The next stage is the reflective observation. In this stage this is where an individual will look back upon the event or activity, review what happened, what went well and what needs to be changed for next time.

The Experiential Learning Cycle

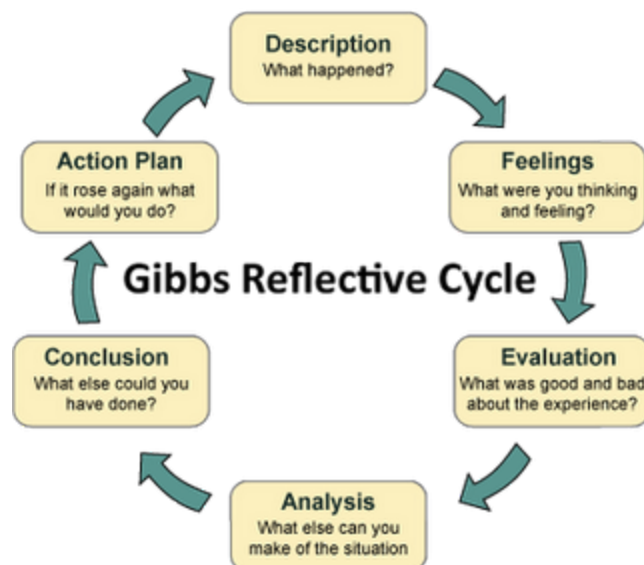


The third stage is this means the conclusion from activity and learn fourth and final experimentation. will take the

gained from reflecting in stage two and concluding in stage three to make a plan in order for them to develop their skills and strengthen and enhance the skills they need to improve. Before going back into stage one concrete experience to put into action their plan.

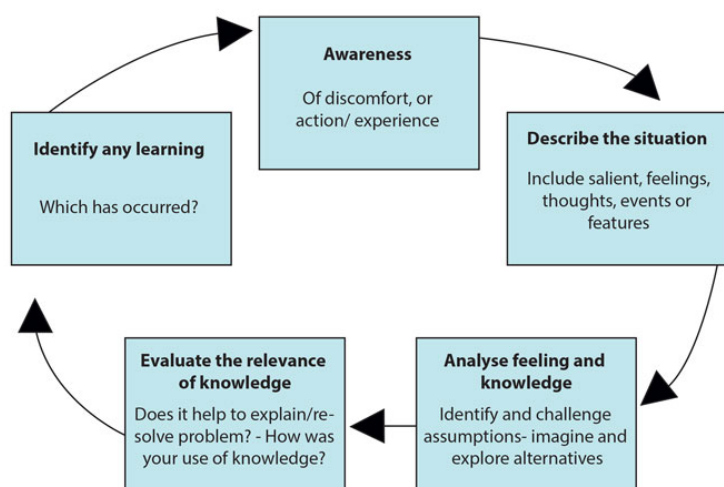
abstract conception, individual will draw a their experience or from it. Moving into the stage, active In this stage individuals knowledge they have

Gibbs reflective cycle consists of six stages as opposed to Kolb's cycle which contained four. In Gibbs reflective cycle he asks the individual questions to get them thinking in order to understand how to reflect well starting with a description of what happened?. Similarly to Kolb's where an individual will start with the experience or activity but where Gibbs is different from Kolb the next stage is feelings, how did the experience or activity make them feel. Before moving on into the next stage evaluation. This is



acknowledging what went well and what did not go well. Stage four is analysis of the event or activity following on then to stage 5 the conclusion. What else could be done to improve the outcome of the experience or activity . The last stage in Gibbs reflective cycle is the action plan. This, like Kolb's reflective cycle, is where the individual will draw up a plan so if they revisit the activity or have a similar experience again they have acknowledged from past experience what they can do to ensure there is a better outcome.

(Source: https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=14520&extra=thumbnailfigure_idm46597345446160, 2020)



The last cycle this paper will acknowledge will be from the works of Atkins and Murphy. This reflective cycle is made of five stages. According to The open University (2020) Atkins and Murphy's reflective cycle can be used and seen as a more indepth support for reflection however that does not mean all other reflective

cycles are not useful, but it is important for individuals to be mindful and try and avoid superficial repossess. The first stage in Atkins and Murphy's cycle is Awareness, this means the action or experience that takes place. Stage two is described the situation. In this stage individuals are asked to describe how they are feeling by also including their thoughts on the experience or action. Stage three is analyse feelings and knowledge by identifying what challenges arose from the action or experience and exploring alternatives. The next stage following on from analyse feeling and knowledge is stage four, evaluate the relevance of knowledge. It is in this stage where individuals will



question whether their knowledge helped resolve the problems from the action or experience. The last stage is stage five, identify any learning.

These cycles can be applied into the early years in the sense that teaching staff are able to reflect on their own self practice. For example, a teacher could have planned a cooking activity however there was too many ingredients place in front of the children so instead of waiting for instructions the children start to eat the ingredients. So what needs to change. Well if they apply kolbs learning cycle staff members can liaise as a team to reflect on the event what went well what did not. What they can do next time so an idea to put in the plan would be start with one ingredient at a time and slowly build up.

In conclusion, reflective practice is a very useful skills for all to use. There are many benefits as to why people should use a relative cycle. These benefits being they help individuals think about their experiences and put their knowledge from it into a plan for how they can improve. They allow for individuals to know their strengths and their weaknesses, people can learn about themselves from using a reflective cycle, they can build up their own confidence once they have seen the plan they made has worked as they have learnt from their mistakes. Kolbs and Gibbs reflective cycles appear to be a more straightforward cycle individuals can follow where as Atkins and murphys seem more complex however if someone was to use the knowledge from other cycles it could be simpler.