

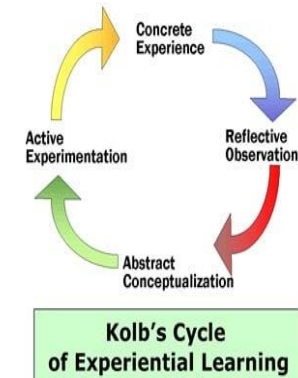
Reflective Practice

How do we define reflective practice?

There are many theorists who have shared their definitions of reflective practice, educationalist John Dewey presented the concept of reflective thinking in the first half of the twentieth century (Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013). Dewey's concept of reflective thinking suggests that a person usually begins the process of reflective practice by thinking about a situation or scenario that has left you feeling worried or uneasy. At this time, we are able to identify what we were attempting to do and what actually happened (Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013). During this cycle of reflective thinking, we are forced to be honest with ourselves, sometimes leaving ourselves open to criticism and asking ourselves critical questions such as "what did I do?" and "what could I change or do better?". Tarrant (2013) believes that through reflecting on one's practice we develop more awareness of our individual strengths and identify areas that we need to develop. Victorian Government (2022) agrees that by thinking honestly, we break down experiences to gain a better understanding that enables us to recognise and proceed with good practice and allows us to review and implement changes on what is not working. According to Schon's theory there are two different types of reflection (Earlandson, P and Beach, D, 2008). Reflection in action, explaining this form of reflection is conducted at the same time the professional action is happening. The second type of reflection Schon refers to is reflection on action which signifies reflection that happens either before or after an actual action. Moon, J (2004) argues that imagination plays a part in reflection in action and therefore suggests Schon ignores a vital feature in the process. As cited by Barentsen and Malthouse (2013) it is suggested Hullfish and Smith (2006) share similar views and emphasise that imagination plays a key role in high quality reflection. Although Schon does not offer a model of his reflection cycle, Kolb designed a cycle of reflective practice with the purpose of design to help people learn from their experiences (Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013). Kolb designed a four-stage model and suggests reflective practice is a process that is ongoing and that whilst reflecting on practice we can identify areas that may require further attention. By using this model Kolb focuses on four key parts of reflection these being concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Through allowing ourselves to reflect on previous actions we identify areas for improvement and continue with the ongoing process of striving to do better in the future (Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013).

Reflection in professional practice

Lindon and Trodd (2016) state that the importance of reflection has been strongly highlighted within important policy documents as well as the curriculum. Moon (2004) believes that both reflective practice and reflection play a key role in professional practice and state these are crucial principles for professionals. In addition to this Thompson and Thompson (2018) suggest reflective practice can be both rewarding and effective within practice, making a positive contribution towards continued professional development. Sharing similar views Moon (2004) agrees through non-reflective practice, we are discouraged from further professional development and practice can be displayed as ineffective. According to Brock (2015) practitioners' reflection should be meaningful to their role and should relate to the work they deliver with young children and their families. Lindon (2012) believes that by becoming a reflective practitioner you are allowing yourself to be more aware of your learning journey and enhancing your awareness and ability to learn from first-hand experiences. Reflective practice is a crucial aspect of working with young children. In order to enhance knowledge and professional development practitioners within Early years are expected to continuously reflect on their practice (Smith and Craft, 2011).



(Aliem: Lin, M, 2010)

Ways in which we reflect

Whether individuals are reflecting at that specific time during an action or reflecting after an experience, they should consider how we document it. Through documenting action, we are simply gathering information which we can then later refer to (Smith and Craft, 2007). There are many practical ways in which we can document information. It is thought a reflective journal containing both observations as well as reflections are beneficial. Other ways thought to be useful include images and sound recordings where we can later look back at in order to reflect on what was working well and what we could improve on (Smith and Craft, 2007). Tarrant (2013) also suggest that keeping a reflection portfolio carries many benefits such as allowing you to take accountability and ownership of your own professional development along with recalling prior experiences that you are able to express influences that have contributed towards your professional development. Although reflection is personal working with peers supports the development of personal reflection and allows you to engage in exploration of ideas with somebody else. Tarrant (2013) also emphasises that by reflecting in a group there is much more to be gained from the experience and the array of voices doing the reflecting.

Reflection in Early Years

Professional Association for Children and Early Years (2016) state that in order to ensure the best care possible for children is provided, reflective practice is crucial, through reflection we strive to improve one's own practice. There are many benefits of reflective practice these include providing better outcomes for children as well as increasing their self-esteem, ensuring we are offering an enabling environment supported by enabling adults with suitable resources that allow the children to explore and develop. The process of reflective practice not only benefits the practitioner and children but also the parents and carers. Where reflection has taken place both parents and carers will be able to see changes within your practice giving them a feeling of confidence that you are offering high quality care that is continuously improving (Professional Association for Children and early Years, 2016). Smith and Craft (2007) believes that when practitioners engage in reflective practice, they are becoming researchers of their own working world and suggests that this is a similar process to how children learn and become researchers of the world around them. Recent studies suggest that through an activity that requires deep thinking during this time children thrive the most (Smith and Craft, 2007). Reflective practice as a practitioner is seen as having the capability to make a difference for the children and families in your care, it is also a crucial element for the way in which we become responsive to children and their needs (Reed and Canning, 2010). Smith and Craft (2007) emphasise that it is good practice to share perspectives and thought with others around you and gives us an opportunity to gain a new insight into our practice. Sharing similar views Reed and Canning (2010) also agree that by sharing our experiences and thoughts with others this enables us to understand an experience and create innovative ideas and ways of working. Reflection is not only a crucial element in improving our daily practice but also plays a key part in understanding play within the early years (Moyles, 2010). Practitioners will always want to improve their practice to benefit those around them within the learning environment they work. By reflecting on practice, it allows us to gain a better understanding of the process which includes a deeper understanding of one's own practice and others, supports us in critiquing and evaluating our own thinking and practice which leads us to a form of action (Moyles 2010).

Reflection within the Education system

Reforms happen when reviews and reflections have taken place. Through reviews and reflection of the previous quality of education in Wales areas for improvement were identified. One area recognised for the need of improvement was ensuring that all education settings meet the needs of every learner, providing an environment that is fully inclusive. In 2011 this resulted in a large-scale reform of the curriculum (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2017). Within the new curriculum that emphasises the focus on a child's well-being, the enabling pathways guidance was also introduced. A Guidance that that was developed to support practitioners and teachers in the implementing the new curriculum which has been developed to be inclusive for all, with a child centred approach being fundamental. The guidance focuses solely on the three key principles that are fundamental for holistic and meaningful learning. The three key principles are made up of three enablers, enabling environment, enabling experiences, and enabling adults. It is believed that by following the enabling pathways guidance practitioners should focus on the quality and impact of the three key enablers to inspire children in their learning. With enabling adults modelling an approach to learning that is fun and joyous using every teachable moment filled with awe and curiosity to support children in developing resilience, independence, and confidence by allowing them to take risks. Enabling experiences should consist of uninterrupted learning that consists of opportunities that support all areas of development with an emphasis on physical development and being outdoors. Children should be supported through these experiences and given time to recognise their feelings and the feeling of others, building emotional resilience. Offering an enabling environment has been a key point of the guidance with children now being able to choose their preferred learning environment, during this time exploration of the environment is key for development (Welsh Government, 2021).

In conclusion it is clear through reflective practice, one's is able to improve their own practice, through critically evaluating your own work, an individual strives to do better identifying what has worked well and what could work better.

Models of Reflection

There are several models of reflection that support individuals in gaining the knowledge to develop the processes of critical reflection. These models can support others in deepening their thought of reflection. Some of the more familiar models of the reflective process is Gibbs (1998) reflective cycle and Kolb's (1984) experimental cycle (Brock 2015). Although differences between the two are noticed visually both Kolb's (1984) and Gibbs (1998) models highlight the importance that observation and reflection on practice has in forming an innovative way of thinking that can be applied to practice (Brock 2015). By following Gibbs' cycle of reflection, it supports others to critically analyse experiences, allowing others to learn from things that did or did not go well which is followed by forming an action plan on what you may do differently in the future (University of Edinburgh, 2020). In addition to Gibbs' cycle, Kolb shares similar thoughts on the process of reflective thinking and emphasises learning as an integrated process with each of the four stages of his cycle being associated with a different type of learning, suggesting effective learning is only seen when we have completed all four steps. Within the four stages of the model, we are able to process the events during an experience, allowing us to evaluate and reflect in order to gain a new knowledge through experience (McLeod, S 2017).

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