



(Source: Colbert, 2010)

Reflective Practice in the Early Years

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Reflective models compared (Element 1)

Reflection can be thought of as learning through everyday experiences (Johns, 2013). We reflect on the things that we learn so that we may deliver our most desirable practice. The Welsh Government (2015) are of the same mind. They state that reflective practice should be to improve the actions we take and, in turn, improve on the practice that we deliver. Reflective practice is vital within the field of education and “unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations” (Larrivee, 2000). To truly grasp the idea of reflection, McGregor and Cartwright (2011) note that it is vital that practitioners ask questions such as “why did it happen this way?” and “what could I do differently in the future?”

There are various models of reflection, including Kolb’s Reflective Cycle and Schön’s Reflective Model.

Schön’s reflective model is composed of two elements, which are reflecting in action and reflecting on action. Reflection in action is what Meierdirk (2016) describes as decisions made quickly by practitioners – decisions made in the moment. Schön (1991) makes use of term such as “keeping your wits about you” and “thinking on your feet” to describe the meaning of reflection in action. This is akin to Dynamic Risk Assessment, wherein practitioners should be constantly evaluating the surroundings and potential for risk in the early years (Play Scotland, 2013). Van Manen (1995) questions Schön’s statements, pondering the actual possibility of thinking while doing, and also how effective this type of reflection would be. Schön’s idea of professional growth is one that truly starts when a person views things with a critical lens by doubting their previous actions. Utilising careful planning, as well as the elimination of other potential problems, doubt can be dispensed and individuals are able to assert their knowledge on a situation (Schön, 1983).

Reflection on action is the practice of reflecting on what has already taken place (Meierdirk, 2016). Reflection on action can be undertaken when alone or even together with colleagues, using recollections of past experiences and evidence collected in practice (Van Manen, 1995). Dewey (2011), however, was of a similar mind to Schön, believing that individuals do their best learning when learning kinaesthetically – also known as ‘learning by doing.’

David Kolb's Reflective Cycle is described as an active process of learning (Lindon, 2012), wherein learning takes place through experience and with the help of a more knowledgeable other. Chen, Jones and Moreland (2014) note the reflective cycle's four stages, beginning when the learner happens upon a new experience – the 'concrete experience' stage. Reynolds (1999) and Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper (2001) note that the reflective cycle introduced by David Kolb is ubiquitous and found in many professions in various fields, whereas Schön's reflective model is specifically aimed at practitioners within education.

These two models of reflection are also differentiated by the process of which you reflect. Kolb's reflective cycle focuses on reflection on action and requires learners to complete every stage in the entire reflective cycle before reflection can truly take place (Bassot, 2016). This is different to Schön's reflective model which allows learners to be in a continuous state of reflection, being ever mindful of their experiences and their surroundings. Bassot (2016) notes that reflection on action is beneficial to practitioners as it will allow them to remove themselves from a situation and reflect in an analytical way, seeing things from multiple perspectives.

Schön's reflective model theory does not discount reflection on action, but believes that reflection in action is just as vital, allowing practitioners to reflect quickly and on the spot. Van Manen (1995) has doubts about the practicality of such an approach to reflection as the classroom is a constantly evolving environment, with certain moments presenting as situation specific. Bassot (2016) agrees in essence, though she does state that reflection in action is a skill that is developed over a long period of time and with a lot of practice.

In 1983, when Schön theorised his reflective model, he did so without creating any structure to support his theory (Roffey-Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013). This is in stark contrast to Kolb, who created a visual model of his reflective cycle to help learners understand his proposed method of reflection. The idea of creating a visual aid for learners is backed up by Pritchard (2017) who explains that individuals learn through a multitude of different mediums and that one such medium is visual imagery. Through Kolb's use of imagery to detail the reflective cycle, he can help learners to gain a sense of progression and come to understand the cycle more when relating it to their own practice experiences.

The final conclusion of Roffey-Barentsen and Malthouse (2013) is that it is vital for

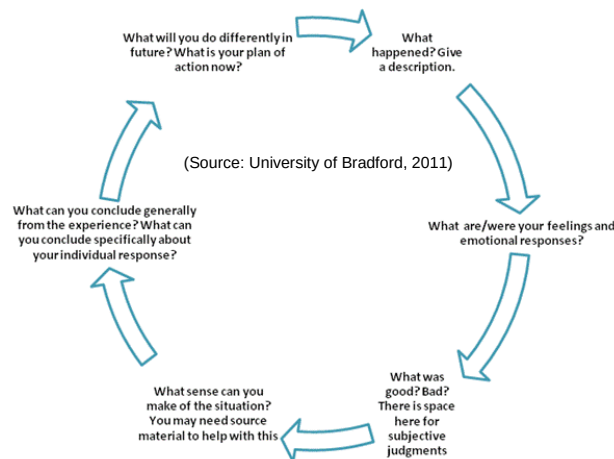
individuals to reflect on their practice so as to better themselves going forward – their skills or their own learning. This is achievable by using a reflective model that is tailored specifically to a situation whether it is Schön's, Kolb's or one of the many other theories developed by early years practitioners. When viewed together, the work of both Schön and Kolb sees the process of reflection as ongoing – a process rooted in the experience that is vital to development, both personally and professionally (Woodbridge, 2014). Reflection is key for adult learning who have accumulated a wealth of life experience and may have become inflexible in their thinking. Reflection allows adults of all ethnicities and from all backgrounds to become better learners and early years practitioners. Reflection allows practitioners to be in a perpetual state of betterment which is beneficial to learning environments when teaching in the early years.

Reflective Practice in the Early Years

(Briefing paper – Element 2)

Just what is ‘Reflective Practice?’

Reflection is a key aspect of any early years practitioner’s practice. It is imperative that practitioners utilise reflective practice as it is expected of practitioners to constantly reflect on their experiences with children and young people (Lindon, 2012). To reflect is to be mindful of yourself, whether this is during or after an experience (Johns, 2013). According to Johns (2013), reflection means to learn through every-day experiences. In turn, we reflect on the things we learn so that we may delivery our best possible practice. The Welsh Government (2019) concur, noting that reflective practice entails improving what we do and making the necessary changes in order to better the delivered practice. Reflection can often mean taking a step back and considering what one is doing and the reasons behind it (Hargreaves and Page, 2013). This is a notion shared by McGregor and Cartwright (2011), who state that questioning one’s practice is a vital aspect of reflection. Also, asking oneself questions such as “why did this happen this way?” and “what could I potentially have done differently?” can aid in the reflective process. Pedagogical documentation can be a useful tool with which practitioners may reflect on their practice (Venninen, 2012), as it can aid in the development of personal and professional reflection and better a practitioner’s practice in the early years. Lindon (2012) stresses that reflection need not take place alone – reflection can be a useful experience when taking place with a colleague.



How important is reflective practice?

Reflection is important as it will allow us, as practitioners, to learn from our very own experiences – experiences that are not read about in a book – but experiences we have personally lived through (Johns, 2013). Reflection is to learn and adapt to unique situations. If practitioners do not engage in regular, meaningful reflection, they risk committing the same pitfalls and becoming stagnant with the delivery of their practice (Roffey-Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013). The absence of meaningful reflection in an early years practitioner’s repertoire will be detrimental to the practice they provide to young children. Larrivee (2000) agrees with this sentiment, noting that, without reflection, early years practitioners risk becoming trapped in a cycle of poorly examined judgements, interpretations and expectations. Reflection is a great asset to early years practitioners as it can allow them to better their problem solving skills (Roffey-Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013). Practitioners can identify a problem and have a degree of control over how it may be resolved. Reflection can potentially lead to practitioners having doubt within themselves and with the quality of their practice (Roffey-Barentsen and Malthouse, 2013). Schön (1991) proposes the notion that this harsh reflection and self doubt can potentially result in uncertainty which would be detrimental to early years practice. He instead stresses that reflection should be an enjoyable experience and be a journey of improvement and also self discovery. The Welsh Government (2019) also stress that reflection should never be about personal criticism but should be about improving one’s actions and, ultimately, improving one’s practice.

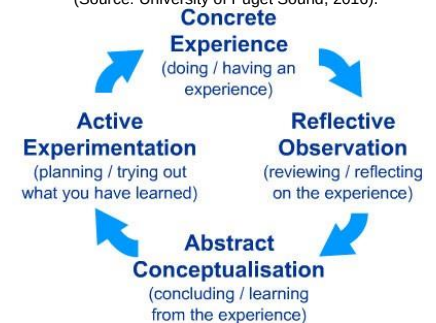
Models of Reflection

There have been many theorists who have created models of reflection with the purpose of making it easier for individuals to understand.

Kolb's Reflective Cycle

Lindon (2012) describes Kolb's Reflective Cycle as a process of learning where individuals learn through their own life experiences and with the help of a more knowledgeable other. The cycle has four stages and commences when a new experience is had by the learner (Chen, Jones and Moreland, 2014). This first stage is labelled "concrete experience." The cycle continues for a further three stages which are reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Kolb's Reflective Cycle is ideal for early years practitioners but is also utilised by professionals in many other fields and professions (Reynolds, 1999).

(Source: University of Puget Sound, 2016).



Schön's Reflective Model

Donald Schön produced a reflective model in the year 1983 (Johns, 2013). Reflection in action and reflection on action are the two key elements of Schön's reflective model. Reflection in action is a practitioner's quick thinking and on the spot decision making (Meierdink, 2016). Describing reflection in action, Schön uses the phrase 'keeping your wits about you' and believes it is possible to simultaneously do, and think about, the experiences we have. Reflection on action takes place once a practitioner has removed themselves from a particular situation and take a step back to evaluate the experience (Meierdink, 2016). Van Manen (1995) tells that reflection on action can be done when alone or together, either with a colleague when reflecting on a shared experience or seeking advice on a personal experience. This Reflective Model has been endorsed by theorist John Dewey who believed that the best learning takes place in a kinaesthetic fashion – when 'learning by doing.'

(Source: Iqbal, Ramzan and Arain, 2016)



Reflective practice within education is described by Hartman (2001) as metacognition, which is 'thinking about thinking' and 'knowing about knowing' (Metcalf and Shimamura, 1994). Metacognition is similar, in practice, to critical thinking, which requires individuals to be in a constant state of questioning – ever evaluating the actions they take and the reasons for those actions. Colman (2001) states that musings on the idea of metacognition date as far back as 384 to 322 BC by the Greek philosopher Aristotle.

Reflective log (Element 3)

<i>Brief description of the activity</i>
I carried out an activity with children aged six to seven in mixed groups of (approximately) six, where I was the lone adult. The activity entailed the children using software on the school iPads in which they would use the internet to collect pictures of local places to collate in a single document entitled “My Town” which they would then take home to show their parents/guardians.
<i>Aim/Objective of the activity</i>
The activity began with the children listening to my instructions and watching as I gave a basic step by step tutorial on the software that they would be using and how they would use the internet to gather images. The aim of this part of the activity is to establish the end goal of the activity, and also for all of the children to gain a basic understanding of the digital footprint – the idea that everything we put online leaves a trail. The children were also taught the importance of identifying the steps that can be taken to keep personal information secure (Welsh Government, 2008). The next step was for the children to open the software they would be using to create their document. Following the instructions and the demonstration, no child had any issues locating or recognising the software icon. Once the application was open the children would add a text box to the centre of their document with the title “My Town.” The children were also given the creative licence to make subtle changes to this title (“Where I live” et cetera). Following this the children would exit the app to open the internet browser and navigate to Google and, subsequently, Google Images. From here they would type in a landmark or attraction close to where they live or within their town – this would be agreed upon by the whole group to streamline the activity and add a degree of cooperation and teamwork. Once the search of the landmark or location returned the relevant images, each child was free to choose any picture they liked, so long as its subject was of the agreed upon location. Once the children had chosen their favourite image, they would save it to the iPad’s picture gallery and navigate back to the previous app. Once back in the app the children had to import the photo they had saved of their agreed-upon location

into the app. They would then draw a line from the title box to the picture they had imported into the document.

Following this, the children would return to Google Images to find a picture of another previously agreed-upon location in their locale. Following the same steps, the children would fill the document with five pictures, all of different locations. By the end of the activity, the children would have a complete spider diagram. This activity meets the criteria detailed by the Welsh Government (2008) in the Digital Competence Framework, which specifies that children of this age should be able to “create and edit multimedia components including text and images.”

Your role

As the lone adult in the activity, it was my responsibility to ensure each child remained engaged for the duration of the activity. I was also on hand to offer assistance if any child had any additional queries or needed technological assistance. I also had to ensure the children’s learning remained relative to the seven areas of learning detailed in the Foundation Phase Framework (Welsh Government, 2015).

Positive aspects – why? How could these be developed further?

Almost every child enjoyed the activity and most understood how to use the software application and how to achieve the aim of the activity. The children seemed engaged and took part in joyous discussion over which locations they would use for their spider diagrams. This activity could be improved upon by creating another spider diagram based on an area the children are not familiar with. The children could either be given a city/country for which to find locations and then use Google to find locations in that city/country, giving them more of a sense of independence and autonomy.

Challenging aspects – why? Link to your own practice.

This activity represented the first time I had ever worked with children. Because of this, I initially found it very difficult to keep the children engaged. To carry out a successful activity the children must be engaged, and I do not feel I started the activity in an enough of an engaging manner. Also, some of the children would push on and complete the spider diagram faster than others as they were already familiar with the app they were using.

*What knowledge did **you** demonstrate?*

When the children struggled to think of a location to use for their spider diagram, I was able to offer suggestions from my extensive knowledge of the area. I was able to stimulate conversations about different possibilities rather than simply telling them what they should do.

*What skills did **you** demonstrate?*

Having earned GCSE qualifications in Information Technologies, I feel I handled the activity well from a technological standpoint. I was able to give the children consistent, valid help with the iPads when they needed.

*Which values did **you** demonstrate?*

Some children were unfamiliar with the app were not able to keep up with the task as well as children who were familiar with the app. I demonstrated inclusivity in this activity by helping these children to understand how to use the app and how they could achieve the activity's aim.

What could be done differently in future? Why?

As discussed previously, some children were able to complete the task faster than others and were getting ahead of the rest of the group. This was poor management on my part as I should have been clearer in my desire for them to complete the task simultaneously, thus allowing them to help each other as well as receiving help from me. In the future it may be beneficial to group together children that already know how to use the software so that they may complete the task at a similar pace. Likewise it may be beneficial to group together children that are unfamiliar with the software so that they can learn it together and at the same pace.

Personal Development Plan (Element 4)

Area for further development (provide further details)	Why?	How?	Who/Where?	When?
1) Academic. Complete undergraduate course in Early Years Education and Care with the minimum of an upper second-class honours degree (2:1).	By achieving a minimum of an upper second-class honours degree (60-70%) I able to prove the quality of my work to prospective employers and course co-ordinators.	I will achieve this by working hard in my studies, participating in plenty of at-home studies and doing my work as early and diligently as possible.	I will achieve this by completing the remaining modules of level 5 at home, learning with my peers through online studies. Once the university has reopened for in-person lectures, I will attend and study at the UWTSD SA1 waterfront campus.	I can achieve this by the end of July 2021 as this is the end of the academic year 2020/2021
2) Knowledge. Re-sit Maths General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).	Welsh Government (2020) state that all Initial Teacher Education programmes will be subject to new entry requirements. Applicants will need qualifications	To attain a B grade in GCSE Mathematics I will need to re-sit the examination. Neath Port Talbot College (2017) offer a one-year course and estimate the costs for the	I will achieve this by attending the Afan Campus of Neath Port Talbot College to study for the Mathematics GCSE re-sit.	Neath Port Talbot College (2017) state this course will take

	including a B grade or above in Mathematics at GCSE level. After taking my GCSE examinations in 2011, I passed Mathematics with a C grade. I will need to resit this exam to attain the required grade.	2020/2021 academic year to be in excess of £100 (unconfirmed due to pandemic).		place on Saturdays. This will allow me to study whilst continuing to work.
3) Knowledge. Postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE).	To achieve my first career goal of becoming a teacher within an early years setting I must achieve a postgraduate certificate (National Careers Service, 2018).	University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) offer Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) postgraduate courses that I can apply to. Since I already hold a C grade in GCSE Mathematics, it is possible to be accepted onto this course under the condition that I complete a GCSE equivalency test during the PGCE year. As a	I can achieve this by be accepted onto, attending, and graduating from the PGCE course offered by UWTSD in the SA1 waterfront campus.	Academic year 2021/2022 at UWTSD SA1 waterfront campus.

		full-time worker I will also need to ensure I have significant and appropriate funding to sustain myself in order to stop work and complete the PGCE.		
4) Experience. More time spent shadowing teachers/practitioners in early years settings.	According to Prospects (2019a), it is desirable for PGCE applicants to hold experience of “working with children in a mainstream United Kingdom (UK) school in the relevant phase” the applicant will be applying for.	Contacting local schools/nurseries will allow me to gain experience in working in the early years and experiencing the minutiae of the responsibilities of early years settings (Prospects, 2019b).	I can achieve this by volunteering in local schools/nurseries/play-schemes.	Due to working a full-time job that is not in the Education sector, I will have to arrange my volunteering to coincide with my annual leave.
5) Skills. Organisational skills.	Due to the nature of my previous achievement goals being very time consuming	I will begin by completing my current undergraduate assignments on time and	I will achieve this at work, at home and at university.	Academic year

	and happening in a similar time scale, I think it is necessary to consider how I will make each of them fit together.	ensuring I give myself enough time to complete them to a high standard. I will also ensure I complete my external responsibilities in sufficient time so as not to interfere with my commitment to completing my assignments on time. I will also endeavour to have my university work completed before I take annual leave from my employment so that I may be free to volunteer at local early years settings.		2020/2021 and beyond.
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