



# REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN THE EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE



## INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper has been prepared to assist incoming practitioners to understand the importance of reflection and reflective practice.

Although one may not be familiar with the term reflection in this context, it is something that all individuals undertake throughout their day-to-day lives, even though they may not be consciously aware of this process.

For example, those that have made a shop/online purchase on a whim, only later 'on reflection' to regret this impulsive decision. Similarly, many people have been in situations where they say something spontaneously only to later wish they had chosen better words – reflection!

Reed and Canning (2010, p. 10), say that 'reflection' is a common term to describe actions including feelings and thoughts about one's previous events. This helps to recognise areas for improvement and evolve our knowledge and understanding.

Aubrey and Riley (2022, p. 236), suggest that 'reflection' is a means by which a person recalls their own experiences, traits, and reactions to gain a better understanding and thereafter be better prepared for similar situations in the future. Johns (2009, p. 58) states that reflection makes individuals conscious of their fears and can recognise how it restricts practice. As one reflects, we overcome and reduce our worries.

This briefing paper outlines in more detail what is meant by reflective practice within the early year's workforce, and the various models that can be adopted to successfully integrate this into the learning process.

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice is an important tool utilised in many different professions and industries. According to the University of Cambridge (NO DATE), reflective practice grew from fields such as healthcare, education, and welfare, wherein those professionals would learn from their own life experiences. Persons working within these sectors would consider the interactions with their contacts and what lessons could be learned. Reflective practice is now commonly used across many professions. Aubrey and Riley (2022, p. 236) state that reflective practice is a mental process in which behaviour is reflected upon to enhance ongoing learning. Additionally, Lindon and Trodd (2016, p. 6) suggest that reflective practice is the procedure of significant ideas and positive careful examination of present-day practice, allowing for an educated assessment regarding plans that result in positive improvement. The University of Cambridge (NO DATE), states that reflection is a methodical assessment process for educators, which links experiences, enabling students to make the most productive progress. There are two principal types of reflective practice, Reflection-in-Action and Reflection-on-Action. Schon (1987, p. 26) distinguishes between these two theories and in simple terms could be understood as follows:

**Reflection-In-Action:** This is where an individual is responding to events occurring at the time. As actions unfold, it may prove necessary to adapt and adjust the original course to suit the changing situation. Paige-Smith and Craft (2011, p. 15), support this by accepting that decisions may need to be made spontaneously and at the time.

**Reflection-On-Action:** This is where an individual considers what has already occurred and reflects on what has previously taken place. Paige-Smith and Craft (2011, p. 15), acknowledge that subsequent and retrospective review could be advantageous.

## IN THE EARLY YEARS

Looking more specifically at the early years environment, reflective practice is of major importance within the field.

Paige-Smith and Craft (2011, p. 1), state that there is a long history of early years practitioners thoughtfully monitoring children's development and learning. However, recently there has been a move to formally incorporate 'reflective practice' into this setting, and to become a valued tool for those working with young children.

Hallet (2013, pp. 24-29), appears to support this by suggesting that the early years environment is developing and adjusting because of amendments in policies led by the government and external pressure on teaching methods. These pressures lead to new thoughts offering opportunities for reflection in order to educate current practice.

Furthermore, Lindon and Trodd (2016, p. 1), advise that in the last 20 years, important curricula and policy papers have stressed the value of reflection as part of professional practice.

Hallet (2013, p.29) also recognises that practitioners within the early years, also complete daily tasks often not considering how or why they are completed. Utilising reflective practice promotes a new way of doing things, adjusting, enhancing, improving, and altering future provision for children.

Reed and Canning (2010, p. 1) suggest that reflective practice is a key part of a practitioner's position, not because it is government-led, but because practitioners are enthusiastic and have active minds, keen to explore, nurture, and adjust to their environment.

## MODELS

There are several different model types to aid reflective practice. Each of these offers its own approach and ideas despite the similarity between them. According to the University of Cambridge (NO DATE), users may have to look for the model that best works for them and the circumstances at the time.

Using reflective models provides structure and pro-forma that can be particularly useful to a new practitioner.

The University of Edinburgh (2021) describes the use of reflective models as engaging with the reflective process in an easy way.

Reflective practice can be undertaken in many ways and is sometimes personal to the individual.

Lindon and Trodd (2016, p. 87) suggest that reflective practice is both a personal and shared exercise. It is personal because it is not always dependant on the attendance of another adult. Cottrell (2021, p. 287) says that a reflective model provides clarity and assists in achieving an organised approach. Usually these are presented as a cycle. The intention being that one utilises what is gleaned from actively reflecting and thus gaining improved understanding and relevant planning for future events

The University of Cambridge (No DATE) discusses the disadvantages of reflective models such as not being suitable for all scenarios, reflective practice is an ongoing process, you don't always start at the very beginning, models restrict you to stages, and the way they must be followed.

## DRISCOLL MODEL

One of the simplest models was initially developed by John Driscoll in 1994, 2000 and 2007. His initial draft focussed on three key inquiries relating to an earlier event:

### What?

Looking at and considering the details of a past event, a description of this should be prepared thus providing a concise recollection of the experience. Thereafter, examples of typical questions to be asked are; What happened? Who was involved? What was done? How was the experience, good or bad?

### So what?

Time to reflect on the experience and what lessons were learned. What were the reactions and why? Have feelings about the experience changed? Did past events affect the activity? Was anyone else involved and what was their input/feedback and why?

### Now what?

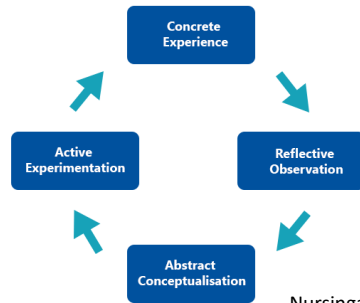
Following reflection, consider what action is required. Would better preparation be useful? Anything that could be changed? Could something different be done in a future similar situation? What went wrong? What will be the future focus?

As observed by NursingAnswers.net (2018), this model has many benefits, primarily due to its simplicity. Unlike other models, this has three stages that are not difficult to recall. In comparison with others it is concise and consequently perhaps used more often.



Source:  
Pinterest  
(2020)

## KOLB'S MODEL



Source:  
Nursinganswers.net  
(2018)

This Experiential Learning Cycle was developed by David Kolb in 1984. According to Cottrell (2021, p. 287) Kolb's model has been notably inspiring improvements within thought processes regarding experiential learning. Kolb (2014, p. 47) states that learning is the method by which information is made by transforming experiences. According to the University of Cumbria (2020), this learning cycle is based on the premise that a person can learn through finding and undertaking for themselves. Users can begin at any stage in Kolb's cycle, although it is sometimes better to begin by considering a concrete experience. By analysing your experience and cycling around the model, one may develop into a proficient reflective practitioner. Kolb's experiential learning cycle has four stages as follows:

**Concrete Experience** – The event or what took place.

**Reflective Observation** – Concurrently recording what is being observed.

**Abstract Conceptualisation** – Developing thoughts about your observations.

**Active Experimentation** – Implementing those ideas. Lindon and Trodd (2016, pp. 73-76) confirm that Kolb's model explains that this active approach to discovery is very different from a structured pattern where more experienced people share or relay information or instruct them on what is required. A benefit to this model within the early years and other similar professions is the focus on experiences first-hand and that of an event that has occurred personally. A direct relationship can be seen here by providing children the opportunity to enjoy first-hand experiences; hands-on as opposed to being pre-prepared by elders.

## GIBB'S MODEL

Another experiential model of reflection is Gibb's cycle. This was developed by Graham Gibbs in 1988 and offers a more comprehensive structure with additional stages, a total of six.

**Description** – Kept brief. Outline of the event and setting of the scene and background.

**Feelings** – How did feelings change throughout the event?

**Evaluation** – Consider factually and evaluate things that went well and items that did not.

**Analyse** – A major part of this reflection cycle. Why did it go well or did not go well?

**Conclusion** – Pinpoint on what has been discovered.

**Action Plan** – What key actions are to be implemented to improve and grow your competency and understanding?



Source:  
Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University (2018)

According to the University of Edinburgh (2020), this continuous cycle provides structure to learn from events and is an excellent way to work through an experience. The event can be a standalone or an experience that one may go through more often. Gibb's initially recommended this model for use in repetitive situations, however, the requirements for each stage also apply well to one-off experiences.

University of Cumbria (2020) states that one of the important features of Gibb's cycle is the focus on the feelings and evaluation elements when reflecting.

## DEVELOPMENT

Reflective practice is a key skill in the development of a professional practitioner.

Brodie and Savage (2015, p. 156), state being a reflective practitioner will be of great benefit for ongoing career development. Miller, Drury, and Cable (2005, p. 100) state that many authors consider reflection to be the principal element of professionalism. Paige-Smith and Craft (2011, p. 149) say that reflective analysis when used in quality assurance or development as professional, may be helpful to the practitioner and serve to tune and enhance practice. It is no surprise that those working in professional development within the early years have studied how to become competent reflective practitioners. This means going beyond achieving actual competence and undertaking critical reflection.

## CONCLUSION

It can be appreciated from the foregoing, that reflective practice has a major part to play for all early years practitioners. Being reflective not only develops you professionally but also provides early years children with an improving learning environment. As noted by the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (2016), reflection will obtain improved results for children. This may include meeting their needs, improving self-esteem, and providing new opportunities, environments, and resources. Additionally, this reflection will also assist families and carers to recognise the practitioner's adjustments in practice, feel comfortable that you are caring, and offer a high and steadily improving standard.

**"Reflective practice is about the way you work, how you think about it, how you could improve your practice and how you could improve outcomes for the children and families in your care!" (Lindon and Trodd, 2016, p. 1)**



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