

Reflective Practice in Education: Comparing Driscoll and Gibbs

Introduction

Reflective practice is a process of continuous self-evaluation to better understand a person's strengths and weaknesses. This helps to develop professionally and improve the quality of one's practice. This is done by looking back at their practice and reflecting on what went well, what didn't work and why events happened (Mathew, Mathew, Peechattu, 2017; Toole, 2023).

This poster explains and compares two models of reflective practice, they are; Driscoll's (1994) reflective model with Gibbs' (1988) theory of reflective practice to evaluate their usefulness for educators.

Importance

The reason that reflective practice is important is because it helps practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of children's development, and with that knowledge they can plan more effective learning experiences (Toole, 2023). Reflective practice allows a practitioner to develop a professional and practical understanding of what they know on paper and therefore they can make better informed decisions about their practice (Brock, 2014; Toole, 2023; OECD, 2021). According to the Welsh Government (no date) reflective practice is fundamental to support the educational development of young children by ensuring a high quality of learning and care.

As well as the positive effects on the children, reflective practice has also shown to have a positive impact on educators. A study in Italy by Cigala, Venturelli and Bassetti (2019) found that using reflective practice can help teachers manage their stress and confidence in their profession. They also found it had a positive influence on their well-being, resilience and self-efficiency.

Dewey's Theory

The foundations of the theory of reflective practice in an educational setting can be traced to Dewey (1933). He defined reflection as a chain or thread of thoughts and actions, a sequence of thoughts and consequences that grow and support into the next step of reflection (Dewey, 1933, p. 3). Dewey (1933, p. 6) believed reflective thought to be an intentional and continual process of evaluating knowledge and beliefs to prove their validity in order to make purposeful decisions about future actions. A simplified explanation of Dewey's reflective thought cycle is that an individual experiences something and feels uncertainty towards it, which then prompts them to inquire and test new actions that can be taken to improve on the experience.

Dewey's theory has been an influential foundation for other theorists to develop their theories and models on reflective practice such as Schön (1983). However, one key limitation is that this theory requires individuals to have time, experience and critical

thinking skills to effectively reflect on their work, which for many individuals in the education sector, where there are high workloads and time constraints, is impractical.

Driscoll's Model

Driscoll's reflective model (1994) is a structured framework that can be used to assist in the process of reflection. It is based around three questions, 'What?', 'So what?', and 'Now what?'. This encourages practitioners to explain the experience of a situation, the implications of it and then what actions they are going to take to improve the situation (Driscoll, 1994, cited in University of Edinburgh, 2021b).

The key benefit of this model is its simplicity, by only having three simple steps to follow it creates a clear and concise plan of action for its users. For this reason, it is mostly used in education and healthcare because it is relatively quick to use and is easier to remember than other models (Greene, 2024). Despite its simplicity being a benefit of this model, it could also be seen as a limitation as it may result in a lack of depth in the reflection and therefore the individual may not have the most effective results.

Gibbs' Model

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) is a framework consisting of six stages to give a structured plan to reflection. The cycle consists of a description of the experience, the feelings during it, an evaluation of the positives and negatives of the experience, an analysis, a conclusion on what was learned and what could be done differently, and finally a plan of action (Gibbs, 1988, cited in University of Edinburgh, 2021a).

There is one aspect of the Gibbs model that could be argued as either a benefit or a limitation, that is the level of detail in its structure. It has the potential to produce an in-depth report that includes both critical and emotional reflection, however, if an individual rushes through or sees this method as a tick-box exercise it could lead to a superficial reflection (McLeod, 2025). This could limit professional development due to practitioners focusing on completing a task rather than examining their experience in a critical way, which may lead to an ineffective solution to the problem.

Comparison

Both Gibbs' (1988) and Driscoll's (1994) models of reflective practice are widely used within education, as they are easy-to-use frameworks that support professional development and learning through reflection.

Despite both using structured frameworks, they differ in the amount of detail that they use, Gibbs uses a six-stage cycle, whereas Driscoll uses three questions. Driscoll's use of three questions makes it an easy-to-use model as it is easy to remember and can be used quickly (Greene, 2024), however, the reflection may lack critical depth which the Gibbs model easily allows by having a detailed step-by-step plan, however, the number of steps and detail may make it overcomplicated to use for some individual. A key

advantage of Gibbs' model is that it includes the reflection of emotional response through the feelings stage (McLeod, 2025). This suggests that emotional responses can influence decision-making and professional practice, and that practitioners should recognise their emotions as a contributing factor in why an experience happened.

The biggest limitation for the Gibbs model is that it requires educators to have sufficient time to complete the full cycle to an adequate depth and detail, where that is realistically not possible. Practitioners already have a high workload with tight time limitations (National Education Union, 2025) and therefore may not have the time or energy to follow such a detailed reflection, whereas the Driscoll model's simplicity means it is less time-consuming, which could help reduce stress and prevent burnout (Southwest General Health Center, 2026), nonetheless, its simplicity could lead to an insufficient reflection due to the potential oversimplification of situations, in comparison to Gibbs' detailed reflection.

Conclusion

Overall, both models have several benefits and limitations that depend on the individuals' needs and situation. If they are willing to sacrifice time for a more in-depth plan then the Gibbs model would be a more suitable choice, on the other hand, if they are willing to sacrifice a certain level of detail in their reflection in favour of accessibility and the possibility of more frequent reflecting then the Driscoll model would be the better choice.