Critically evaluate and systematically apply one model of reflective practice to a learning, assessment or practice/employment issue.

Reflection is a vital tool for caring professionals and helpers; it allows an individual to explore their feelings, beliefs, values, and behaviour whilst analysing and evaluating their actions in order to improve the outcome should a similar situation arise.

In an attempt to impart my knowledge and understanding of Reflective Practice, this essay will endeavour to critically evaluate and systematically apply Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle by use of comparison. In addition, this work will critically discuss Kolb's Model (1984) alongside similar Reflective Practice Models such as The Ladder of Inference (Argyris 1972), Gibbs' Reflective Model (1998) and the Me, My, More, Must Model (Wareing's 2016).

Following the application of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) to a previous learning experience, this essay will showcase how the utilisation of Kolb's Model (1984) was the best choice and most natural fit. In order to develop further, this essay will move onto the exploration of whether or not another Model would have perhaps been better suited to that particular experience and if so, which model and why.

Subsequent research into the Wearing Model (2016) highlights the limitations of applying Kolb's (1984) Model to my future training as a Counsellor. I believe that by utilising the Wearing Model (2016) alongside Kolb's (1984), I would be better able to understand how my values and belief system impact my future Counselling Practice. I would be congruent with myself and my Reflective Practicing would be exceedingly comprehensive.

The Experiential Learning Cycle was developed by Kolb in 1984 and has been significantly influential in relation to adult learning. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory provides an alternative to the traditional teaching classroom approach and offers

alternative opportunities for learning, change, and development (Healey and Jenkins 2000). According to Kolb (1984), “Learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.”

Kolb’s model (1984) provides a robust example which showcases how different learning styles must be combined in order to ensure that effective learning takes place. Cowan (1998) refers to the four stages of Kolb’s Model (1984) as experiencing, reflecting, generalising and testing. Cowan (1998) argued that Kolb (1984) created the different stages of reflection to mirror the four different styles of learning: Auditory, Kinesthetic, Reading/Writing, and Visual. As all Students have individual learning needs, Kolb (1984) worked to ensure his model would be applicable to a wide range of Students no matter their preferred learning style. Kolb’s (1984) driving force sought to raise students' awareness of their own learning differences by encouraging them to be more flexible and to prepare for external learning experiences.

Kolb (1984) worked to ensure his Model would be applicable and adaptable; his work is still relevant today as the different learning styles have not changed (An & Carr, 2017). Despite the fact that the learning styles have stood the test of time and remained unchanged (An & Carr, 2017), some question whether they were ever as useful as Kolb (1984) previously suggested.

Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle accelerates learning for students and provides them with a variety of different life skills which they can strengthen and develop whilst using the cycle (Dixon, 2017). These skills include critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making. These skills take the students beyond theories in the classroom and into advanced practical learning which offers a superior environment for knowledge retention (Stice, 1987). McCall (2004) also agrees that the primary way to learn is through experience.

For example, Doctors and Nurses undergo Internships and Residency as a way to put their theory into practice and to learn through their experience.

An additional argument in favour of Kolb's (1984) Model is that it can be employed freely through a range of disciplines as it can be applied to both single and recurring events. It can also be utilised by a broad range of individuals regardless of what they are attempting to learn or understand (Healy & Jenkins, 2000).

Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle is broad. However, whilst some argue the Model underdeveloped (Heron, 1992), other researchers such as (Healey and Jenkins 2000) believe the Kolb Model (1984) provides teachers and trainers the opportunity to practice the Model with students so that they may guide them through the learning experience. Healy & Jenkins (2000) support this argument as they draw attention to the Experiential Learning Cycle as a preliminary lesson plan to prepare for delivery.

Although Kolb's (1984) theory has received much praise from the viewpoint of teachers and those in the medical and health care professions (Healey and Jenkins 2000), it also attracts some scrutiny due to its limitations. For example, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) does not take into account the social or institutional aspects of learning. It also ignores factors that could inhibit learning such as gender, social class, and culture (Akella, 2010). What Kolbs (1984) Experiential Learning Theory significantly lacks is traditional learning and applied theory for those not experiencing learning in a classroom.

Kolbs (1984) largely relies on the individual to make decisions based on what knowledge they have collected through their experiences and what beliefs and values they hold. This could potentially prolong an individual's learning experience for certain events as they may need to move through Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory several times in order to achieve the desired outcome. However, if additional targeted learning were to be applied earlier within the cycle, for example reading a book or taking a class it could perhaps

lead to a successful outcome in a shorter amount of time. Therefore, it is only when Kolb's (1984) Theory is applied with traditional learning or theory can it be useful and lead to successful learning.

As with many other learning models, student involvement and willingness plays a large part in how effective the model is likely to be. If the student does not put in the necessary effort and time into any of the Models, they will be unsuccessful.

Entwistle (1991) goes one step further and suggests that the Experiential Learning Model cannot be successful when used alone and recommends that individuals using this theory should embrace a wide range of learning styles and Models in order to have success with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) and reach the preferred outcome.

Typically Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is preferred by individuals in professions that require continuous professional development, such as Teaching or Healthcare. (Turesky & Wood, 2010). On the other hand, the Experiential Learning Cycle may also suit entrepreneurial professions as Kolb's Model (1984) advocates learning by experience, something which entrepreneurs practice daily (Dennison, 2009). For this same reason, Kolb's Model (1984) would also be beneficial for Kinesthetic learners who require hands on experience in order to effectively retain information (Fleming and Mills, 1992).

Over the years Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) has been globally utilised in teaching. However, it has also been critiqued vigorously by other academics who have compared Kolb's work (1984) to other models and ultimately found the Experiential Learning Theory has fallen short; for example, in 1992, Heron suggested Kolb's (1984) Theory was underdeveloped. Although Gibbs' Reflective Model (1988) could be considered similar to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (1984), the Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) has expanded with additional reflective steps which work to counteract this criticism.

Gibbs (1988) puts particular emphasis on feelings during and after the event or experience. Although Kolbs' Theory does explore reflection in the cycle's second step, Kolb places less emphasis on the feelings one experiences during the event itself and throughout the reflective process. Although there is an element of analysis and evaluation within both models; Kolb fails to dedicate an entire step to each whereas Gibbs' model (1988) is much clearer in relation to suggesting where the individual should pause in order to analyse and then move onto their evaluation. The final stage within Gibbs' Model (1988) is to create an action plan which seeks to improve the outcome should a similar event occur in the future. Similarly, Kolb's (1984) final stage is active experimentation whereby the Model user implements their learning to repeat the incident when possible to achieve the desired outcome.

At first glance it is possible to conclude that both models are similar, that Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle Model is an oversimplified version of Gibb's (1988) Reflective Model. However, within other peer-reviewed articles and research founded upon Kolb's work, (1984) it is clear that some academics would disagree that these cycles follow a similar process. Seemingly, the individuals that utilise Gibbs' Reflective Model (1988) learn through repetition whilst individuals that utilise Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model implies learning through experience. Conversely others argue that Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle is designed to be more of a guide rather than a stepped model (ICS Medical, 2019).

Kolb's Experiential Learning (1984) may be particularly beneficial to Person-Centred Counsellors who need to remain congruent throughout the learning process (Rogers, 1951). Employing Kolb's Model (1984) would therefore be of particular relevance to myself throughout my training as a Counsellor.

Argyris' (1972) Ladder of Inference is a tool which most people can apply to day to day experiences; However, it may be particularly helpful for individuals who have

experienced stressful and dangerous situations, as well as for those who experience comparable situations often within their line of work, such as Police Officers. The Ladder of Inference (1972) is designed to help individuals assess each situation and reflect on whether what they experienced was their version of reality or what has in fact actually occurred (Christopher, 2015). Argyris's (1972) could also be particularly useful within the setting of a therapeutic counselling session as it borrows from the re-framing strategy; a strategy which White *et al.* (2008) argues is the underpinning of counselling as a whole.

Kolb's (1984) Model was developed with learners and teachers in mind, whereas Wareing (2016) developed a Model for value-based reflection for Health and Social care student practitioners within the NHS. Although Wareing's (2016) My, My, More, Must model is the most recent among Gibbs (1988), Argyris (1972), and Kolb (1984), and therefore arguably more relevant, it appears to be the Model with the least amount of information widely available. As a result, it is the least critiqued by academics and other health care professionals. The lack of peer-reviewed material for Wareing's work (2016) is a considerable weakness as it makes it very difficult to critique.

On the other hand, as a result of the research I conducted in regards to the 'Me, My, More, Must' theory, I am able to recognise the benefits for both student and experienced counsellors alike as the Model works to aid its users in improving their counselling skills and reflective practice.

In employing Kolb's Experiential Learning's first step (1984), the concrete experience I have selected to reflect upon began in 2015. I was eighteen when I travelled solo to America to participate in the Camp America programme. It was the first time I had been away from home, and therefore a massive emotional undertaking. For this trip I relied heavily on the itinerary and coordination provided to me by the Camp America organisers. I put all of

my trust in their experienced ability to get me from London to the Camp in New Hampshire via Newark unaccompanied.

My journey began on an eight hour flight from London to Newark Liberty International Airport. Unfortunately, unforeseeable events such as multiple Plane and Bus delays from Newark airport meant that when I arrived at Port Authority Bus Station too late, I had subsequently missed my Greyhound Bus to New Hampshire. I was stranded in Port Authority in the early evening. I found myself in the middle of an unfamiliar city with just about enough money for food. I instantly spiraled into panic mode as I was told the next bus would not be until the following day. I was without a backup plan and I had nowhere to go.

With only 10% battery on my phone, I rang my parents in distress. After reassuring me that we as a family could sort something out, they hung up and set to work finding a hotel for me to spend the night. Those ten minutes seemed like an hour. There seemed to be nothing I could do to help myself or improve the situation; I felt helpless, a feeling I realised I never wanted to experience ever again. My parents had managed to book a Hotel room for me in the centre of Times Square; initially, I was relieved until I realised that I now had to find my way to the hotel. Following an inspection on Google Maps, I attempted to walk the ten minutes to the hotel. However, I quickly discovered that I was lost and after 45 minutes I was again in a panic; I decided to get a cab in the hopes that the cab driver would know where the hotel was. Unfortunately that was not the case as, following my departure from Port Authority to my arrival at the Hotel, the ten minute journey had taken a total of an hour and a half.

I experienced Kolb's (1984) second step Reflective Observation, when I arrived at my room and it hit me all at once. I experienced my first Migraine which caused nausea, vomiting, and severe temperature fluxuations. I knew I never wanted to go through that ever again. This did not just apply to Camp America or travelling, this applied to any situation. I

believe it was this event that moulded me into the person I am today: someone who prepares for anything and everything.

When I woke up the next day I was still unwell but managed to find my way back to Port Authority and I managed to make it onto the Greyhound bus. From there, I had a seamless journey to New Hampshire where I spent the remainder of the summer. During the bus journey I remember thinking about what I could have done differently; this is Kolb's (1984) third step of Conceptualisation.

I never forgot that awful experience in Port Authority and when I decided to go to Camp America in 2016 I made sure that I took complete control of my journey. I had learnt from my previous experience of solely trusting others with my welfare and I was not about to put myself in that position again. This led me to Kolb's (1984) final step active experimentation where I tried alternative behaviour.

As I was determined to take control over my second trip to Camp America, my preparation consisted of booking my own flights, buses and accommodation; I made sure I left plenty of time in between transportation transfers so that even if flights or buses were delayed, I would not be left in the same situation as last year. Having control of my own travel arrangements worked well for me. During my second year I felt more relaxed; if I had missed a bus or plane, I would have known exactly what to do next. I also took a spare phone battery and emergency fund in case I needed to book a hotel nights stay again. I felt more at peace on this journey and therefore experienced less stress. This resulted in me experiencing no sickness and so when I arrived at the Camp, I was ready to start work immediately.

I believe Kolb's (1984) model is best suited to the aforementioned experience and subsequent stressful life experiences. Unknowingly after the event I carried out Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle naturally to a certain degree before attempting to revisit Camp America the following year. I have also revisited the same experience in this essay and in

doing so I was able to learn from it further and realise that that experience changed my behaviour and the actions I now take in preparation for all travelling.

While Gibbs (1988) would have been a suitable and relevant alternative to Kolb's (1984) model, I naturally completed part of the Experiential Learning Cycle in the aforementioned experience and so Kolb's cycle truly resonated with me. I am also a Kinesthetic learner and have found I learn quicker through practical learning and application. I believe this has also had an impact as to why I believe I found Kolb's model suitable for me. Although Argyris (1972) could also be applied to this situation, I believe I did not experience a false reality, and whilst the experience was taking place I believe Argyris (1972) Ladder of Inference would have been an over complicated approach to the event.

I would use Kolb's model again for similar learning situations. I also see Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory working well for workplace issues with colleagues, clients, or management and will attempt to implement the Experiential Learning Cycle into my weekly reflections at work.

I believe applying Kolb's (1984) model to my experience in America helped me to distinctively apply some of Kolb's steps to the experience, allowing me to review and reflect on the experience between arriving at the Camp and before undertaking the experience again the following year. During the time in between I also learned from the experience and planned for future travel. Without the use of this model I may not have learned from that experience and put a plan of action in place to avoid facing the same issues again the following year.

When considering the aforementioned research highlighted within this essay, Reflective Models are widely recognised within different professions such as Teaching (Healy and Jenkins 2000), Nursing (Atkins and Murphy, 1994) and Entrepreneurship. This

Model has a proven record of being extremely useful in aiding professionals and students to grow, develop, and learn from their experiences (Kassean et al, 2015).

As previously mentioned, Kolb's (1984) model is useful for significant stressful life events and I would and have, sometimes unknowingly, repeatedly used it in other life experiences. However, whilst carrying out this essay and this exercise I believe Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model could also be applied to day to day decisions. For example, building a morning routine. If each day for a week an individual tried out a different morning routine and conducted Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1984) every night. Over the course of the week, each day the individual would learn from the previous and try something new. By the end of the week an individual would have a useful understanding of what fits for them as a person and what worked and what did not. Therefore, Kolb's (1984) model could be applied to a plethora of life categories.

However, looking toward the future as a MA counselling student, I believe I could utilise Kolb's Model (1984) as part of my higher learning. I would use it as part of my practical learning whilst conducting volunteer work in order to improve my practice. Dewey (1933) wrote that experience on it's own is not educational and instead encouraged students to reflect in order to get to the bottom of true reality.

It is imperative that Reflective Practice Models are accessible and coherent in order to be applicable to a wide variety of individuals, no matter if they're attempting to learn from a teacher in a classroom, on-the-job learning at work, when seeking to improve their decision making, critical analysis, and problem solving skills (Long & Kocakulah, 2007).

To summarise, this essay has critically evaluated Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle and a comparison of other similar Reflective Models such as Argyris Ladder of Inference (1972), Gibbs Reflective Model (1998) and Wareing Me, My, More, Must Mode(2016). Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle was then systematically applied to a lived

experience followed by a full evaluation on whether or not its application was successful and if I would use Kolb's model again in similar circumstances. This essay also explored the issue as to whether or not another model would have been better suited to that particular experience and if so, which model and why.

To conclude there are many reflective models out there that can be applied to a wide variety of situations, all with their own strengths and limitations. As students of counselling and of life we can take these models and apply them to real life experiences in order to grow within our professions and our personal lives. In regards to my own experience mentioned above, I believe on this occasion Kolb (1984) was the best model for this scenario, although I do not believe it to be a one size fits all. I am already considering how I could utilise other reflective models for other events I have experienced in the past or may undergo in the future. I am particularly looking forward to exploring Wareing (2016) in more depth and applying it throughout my counselling studies and volunteering experience.