

I am a HLTA working in a Primary School supporting Year 6 and teaching PSHE lessons. I have recently gained certificates for courses on autism and learning difficulties. I have been preparing RWI resources and creating lesson plans for PSHE lessons across the school.				ECEY4009/C 2312292 Word count 537
Objective	Actions	Resources	Target date for achieving objective	Success criteria
Complete Level 3 in British Sign Language.	I have already gained a level 2 in British Sign Language. To gain my level 3 I will study and watch the content of the videos available and practise signing whilst viewing to help my fluency within sign language.	I will continue the course material and practise memorising by doing exercises repetitively. Level 3 has more conversation exercises so practise is essential. I will reach out to a friend who is deaf to develop my conversation skills within signing, hoping to rectify any mistakes made.	June 2024	I will be able to finish the course, and complete my final assessment with confidence. I will gain level 3 certificate in BSL as recognition of my achievement. I will continue to use my sign language and implement my learnings within my class helping others develop their skills.
Research and implement the Thrive approach in my school.	I am interested in the Thrive approach that we currently use at my school. I will do some reading and research into the approach the school takes and liaise with current practitioners at my school. I will observe a Thrive session. I will ask my Headteacher if funding is available for me to train and gain practitioner status.	I will research through books and online articles about social and emotional wellbeing and make notes to gain information and help with my understanding. I will again meet with peers to share ideas. I will attend online courses relating to Thrive or other social/emotional courses.	December 2023	I will be more informed on the approach and will be able to use my knowledge to improve the mental health and wellbeing with the children I support and even be able to take my studies to help others outside a classroom environment within everyday life.
To gain confidence presenting a course to adults.	I will need to present an induction programme to newly appointed Teaching Assistants with the EAS. Previously I have delivered this training within my school but next time it will be to a wider audience in schools across South Wales.	I will need to attend a planning meeting beforehand to familiarise myself with the most recent programme. I need to contribute my ideas during these meetings.	Ongoing	I will be able to present myself without unnecessary shyness or nerves. I will feel more confident to contribute to discussions.
To develop my Welsh Language skills.	I am not a Welsh speaker so I have been learning alongside the children in my class. I have picked up some incidental welsh and am able to use some good phrases.	I will communicate with the Welsh lead in my school for some personal tutoring. I have downloaded the Duolingo app and have been completing this daily to improve.	Ongoing	I will be able to keep up in lessons and speak confidently. If I'm needed to cover a Welsh lesson I will be able to deliver with confidence.

What is reflection and what is reflective practise?

According to Dewey (1933) reflection is a thought process that is actively developed as a purposeful action. Although he is an original theorist, his views are still relevant in today's world. He believed that by being curious and asking questions made practitioners aware that they could implement change into their practice. This is supported by Schon (1991) who states that reflection is knowledge in action to engage a process of learning. It is thinking about experiences, considering situations and learning from them for the future.

Lindon (2016) summarises that reflective practice is an important professional and personal mindset to develop. This can take time for practitioners to develop in their practice and may need several tries before coming familiar with the approach. When successfully implemented, it allows practitioners to share experiences, knowledge and seeing things in a different way. This then leads to evaluation of what they have put in place to then begin reflection again.

Brock (2015) suggests when practitioners reflect they gain professional knowledge and understanding which then identifies ways to change practice and to improve in areas of personal or professional development. This allows the practitioner to enhance problem solving skills by thinking and questioning to improve their practice. Learning from reflective practice will address challenges and improve decision making.

Why is reflective practise important to Early Years practise?

Hallet (2013) explains that working in Early Years is a process of continuous change where practitioners need to keep up to date with changing policies and practices. The importance of reflection is part of several core documents making it essential that practitioners improve practice through reflection.

It is important for Practitioners to change their practice and focus on the child's perspective and how they learn (Schon). This is supported by Gibbs (1999) who explains reflection using a mirror metaphor. He says that reflection is looking at different perspectives. The practitioner would be seeing things from a child's view and would be able to plan or change practice to reflect this.

Paige-Smith (2011) also states that practitioners working together provide opportunities to share perspectives and compare thoughts. This can be helpful for interactions with multi agency professionals. Reflection is therefore an important part of practice and will benefit the children in a setting along with their parents and carers. Being reflective will support maintain and continually improve practice.

There are several benefits to children's development as their individual needs are met, self-esteem increased and their environment will be appropriate with suitable resources and opportunities to learn. Parents will also feel confident in practitioner's ability as they will see high quality care provided for their child that is constantly improving.

The theory of reflective practise

Schon (1987) states that to reflect on and in action is important for continuous learning to happen. His theory is relevant to professionals in their everyday practise. He believes that reflection in action was a way of learning through an experience, deciding how to act at the time and acting immediately. Often people who reflect in action are experienced practitioners who use their knowledge to make decisions quickly. Reflection on action is exploring an experience after the event has taken place. This leads to questioning what practitioners could do differently next time and using the information gained to inform and process actions and feelings.

Dewey (1910) explored relationship between reflective thinking and learning and says that reflection is part of people's thought processes that need developing. He concentrates his theory on thinking, problem solving and reasoning. Although his research was over a century ago, it is still very relevant today in our ever-changing world. He believed that being reflective was a routine action, doing something without thinking and experiences. As well as asking questions, being curious, and implementing change.

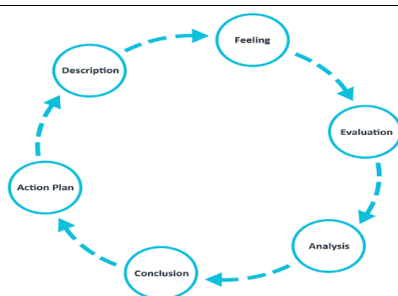


Figure 1: Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1998)

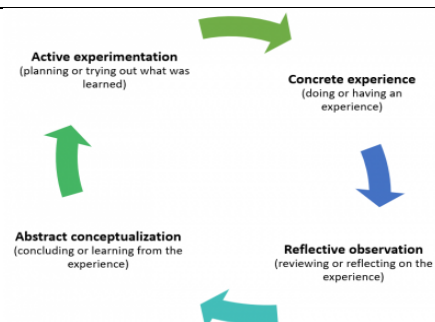


Figure 2: Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning (1984)

Analysis of models

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1998) builds on other theorists' model but adds more stages. It is a more complex model as it gives questions to think about during the cycle however the stages can act as a guide to reassure along the way. This is similar to Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning but it adds personal reflection allowing you to acknowledge your personal feelings of the experience which may influence your reflection. These feelings can be considered during and after the experience. Similarly, practitioners would reflect on the experience at the evaluation stage but not only their feelings, but those of others. As with Kolb, there is an analysing stage where practitioners will dig deeper to make sense of the experience. With the conclusion stage Gibbs' model suggests questions to emphasise how to improve next time and then begin an action plan to make changes to practice and question what will be done differently next time based on previous thoughts. However, this model makes assumptions over experiences and following the cycle may not suit everyone because of this. This may be more suited as a starting point for people new to reflection.

Kolb (1984) uses a four-stage model which allows practitioners to reflect and draw on conclusions after an experience or event. Firstly, there will be a concrete experience which causes reflection or a new idea to test out. Next, will be a reflective observation where they question the experience. Then, during abstract conceptualisation analysis will be made to reflect further. This is done by connecting previous actions with practitioners' own knowledge to draw a conclusion and decide if change is needed. Finally, they can actively put their reflections into practice to try out new ideas to different situations. Kolb's model helps integrate theory and practice where practitioners feel, watch, think and do and apply learning to new situations. However, it doesn't take into consideration that practitioners have different styles of learning and there is no room to accommodate these in the cycle.

Conclusion

Many models of reflection are similar and follow the same themes. Each model has a slightly different approach and can contain a different number of steps. Some models are more complex than others with the theorists explaining in depth. Reflective models are a structure to follow and provide a start and end point but some reflections may not always have a starting point to begin.

Reflection is a personal process and it's about finding one to best suit a practitioners' experiences. They may have to try several models before finding one that fits a situation. By being a reflective practitioner, they will develop their skills which leads to improving their practice.

In this essay I will discuss the role of the practitioner and the aspects of professional practice including values, communication, safeguarding, and principles.

Professionalism is defined by Brock (2015) as having theoretical knowledge and skills, training through higher education and seeing professional development as a lifelong process. She states that a professional should be 'accountable, articulated and to advocate' for the education and care for children, whatever their role or setting.

Reed and Walker (2015) suggests that in other careers a professional would be defined as having qualifications but Early Years professionals demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the child's needs and place a greater importance on the individual's qualities and skills over formal qualifications. They also discuss the practitioner's practice where the needs of the child are central combined with values and principles to support the child's learning and development. Practitioners are now encouraged to undertake professional development, constantly re-evaluating their practice to keep up with changing policies and procedures.

Hallet (2013, cited the Department for Education and Skills 2005, p. 99) who introduced a number of policies and framework. In this there was a need to focus on training for practitioners in early years to reflect the growing demands for professionalism. The Early Years Professional Status was encouraged by all settings in the day-care sector to improve practice and support others, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Values are important for a professional practitioner because working in Early Years Education is an important role to care for and support children who are the next generation.

According Birth to 5 Matters (2021) building relationships will support learning and development and young children will share these experiences with a trusted adult. The role of a professional practitioner requires specific knowledge and skills to be successful. Therefore, core values such as professional commitment and integrity are paramount in Education.

Hallet (2013) explains Early Years is a process of continuous change, so keeping up to date with professional learning is key to best practice. Hyson and Tomlinson (2014) supports this by stating

that professionals apply their knowledge to ensure children's welfare and best interests are at the core of all decisions.

Powell (2010) states that there are many important values for practitioners. These refer to communications skills between children and their families which builds trust and respect. Being able to work as part of a team is essential as practitioners need to communicate to share information and making a day run as smoothly as possible to enable the child to feel comfortable in their setting.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (2021) suggest values are significant as they help to develop professional identity in education. Practitioners develop their skillset and are committed to ongoing learning and training. This allows for practitioners to have confidence in their ability to deliver high quality practice and essential support to families.

Dunhill (2009) states that when working with children, families and carers, communication is fundamental to building positive relationships. It involves listening, understanding and responding to all aspects of communication by children and those caring for them.

GOV.UK says that communication with parents can build trust when practitioners involve them with the care of their children. This can be built by sharing information when settling the child in, home visits and daily chats with a key person putting parents at ease. This is supported by Early Years Foundation Stage framework (2023) which states that working with parents builds a relationship. Communication with Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators are essential to identify support needs as soon as possible to allow children the best opportunities to achieve their potential. To do this, practitioners need to liaise with other adults to observe and assess alongside the SENCO.

According to City and Guilds (2023) Effective communication can include non-verbal gestures such as body language and eye contact. These are important to appear friendly and to show respect. There are many key features of effective communication including being empathetic, honest, and being considerate of other people's feelings.

United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (2004) is a global charter to ensure all children have the right to life, to develop, to be protected, and the right to participate. There are fifty-four articles all together with the majority referring to the child and a minority referring to the Government working together to ensure the child's rights are protected.

These rights are basic in our world such as food, shelter and medical care. However not all countries are fortunate to have the National Health Service and few countries suffer with poverty which can cause difficulties.

Article twelve of the UNCRC states 'Respect for the views of the child'. This is important for practitioners to take children's interests into consideration and plan their learning around these.

Article thirty-one of the UNCRC also supports early years practice as 'Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities'.

Communication is essential when safeguarding. Being an Early Years practitioner requires keeping children safe and conversations are important in a setting to ensure that concerns are noted and dealt with accordingly.

According to Social Care Wales (2017) The Welsh Government set out Professional Development principles for the Early Years. These were seven core aims

- Have a flying start in life
- Range of education and learning opportunities
- Health and free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation
- Access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- Listened to, respected, race and cultural identity recognised
- Have a safe home and community supports physical and emotional needs
- Are not disadvantaged by poverty.

These are linked to The UNCRC as almost every Government shares this global charter.

According to Wilson (2016) partnerships with parents built on relationships and engagement, enhanced the learning and development of the child. This can be beneficial to the parents as practitioners can provide information and refer to a wide range of other professional support if needed. This can lead to building trust between practitioner and parents and will enable parents to share their anxieties.

GOV.UK states that partnership is essential in Early Years for settling children into a setting. They recommend that practitioners invite parents into the setting to get to know all about the child and their parents. Information such as family and culture can give opportunities to for the parent to contribute and allows the practitioner to know how to respond to the child's best interests

building trust between practitioners and parents. Practitioners will also check in everyday with the parents and share everything about the child's day to keep the parents informed.

There are several multi-agencies working alongside each other in Early Years. Reed and Walker (2015) says that working with others ensures that everyone is giving support to the children and their families to meet their needs and ensure safeguarding if vulnerable. They state that practitioners need confidence and be able to reflect to work openly with other professionals.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children are another example of agency dedicated to keeping children safe by working in partnership with families, the community and schools. Together for childhood is a programme run in communities for practitioners to share their knowledge and experience, developing local relationships and deliver activities to keep children safe. They also conduct local services where they can work with families in need such as building blocks and family focus giving support to parents with children identified as higher risk from harm.

Little Learners (2022) focused a YouTube video on 'In the moment planning' from Anna Ephgrave, where children explore their interests and observations are made. This leads to a teachable moment where practitioners ask open ended questions and step in to facilitate the child's learning. These outcomes or answers are documented to inform the practitioner of next steps in learning or to further an interest. The environment should contain authentic resources and experiences with easy access to outdoors. Practitioners follow the scheme of focused task, with an adult led activity. Enhanced provision where resources are added based on the child's interests and continuous provision where resources and areas are available. This allows children to show engagement in their play with environments full of open-ended resources in a free flow design. This allows the child to explore their interests and move around with ease.

GOV.UK explains that 'teaching and curriculums should be adaptive, responding to the needs of children'. Practitioners ensure that settings should be inclusive, finding ways to engage with children and enabling them to achieve their full potential. Hwb (2023) supports this by saying that by the practitioner's knowledge of understanding of the child's development can then create learning that is focused on creating engaging experiences and effective environments to meet the child's needs.

According to Gasper (2015, cited Reed and Walker, 2015 p. 224) practitioners strive to meet the needs of the children they care for by planning learning to support their development. They are dedicated to their role in providing best practice by understanding the child and their needs using their knowledge and understanding of all aspects of the child's development.

In conclusion, being a professional practitioner working in Early Years has knowledge and understanding in the needs of the child and their development. Practitioners support the children through focusing on those needs and development and allow the children to access resources in their setting that are open ended. Practitioners have many qualities and values to secure professional relationships with children, their families, colleagues and other professionals. They are able to communicate effectively to build trust and respect and recognise the importance of sharing information, particularly if there are concerns of the safety and welfare of the child. Practitioners also create safe and healthy environments to ensure children are acknowledged and valued.

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