

Introduction

By critically analyzing the importance of professionalism and professional practice, this essay will demonstrate the significance professional practice has in meeting the inclusive and individual needs of children. This essay begins by describing what it is to be a professional and understanding professional practice. It then describes the core values of being a professional practitioner and why communication and relationships are important to meeting the needs of children. Why having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of professional practice and other aspects including safeguarding is important. The significance of multi-agency work. Subsequently it delves into how observation and planning inform professional practice and ensure practitioners meet children's needs. Lastly, how principles of the UNCRC inform professional practice and why it is important.

The definition of a professional suggests an individual requires a high-level of education and specific training in their field of work (Eraut, 1994). Stacey (2009) Argues it is challenging to agree on a definition of professionalism in the early years. Bolam et al. (2005, page vi) acknowledge this complexity and propose that all employees, regardless of their level of education, participate in professional learning communities. A professional can lead by example, showing their knowledge, skills set, values and ethical standards (Perez, 2019). Chalke. (2013) Concurs that a clear understanding of behaviors, attitudes and skills signifies a professional's role.

Lyngstad and Schei and Ødegaard (2024) Discusses the importance of professional identities and how personal experiences are linked with professional experiences. According to Lightfoot, S. and Frost, D. (2015) Professional identities include values, responsibilities and ethical standards. Professional identity is the idea that who we are as individuals compliments how we are perceived as professionals.

Professional practice refers to the practical application of professional skills and knowledge (Johnston et al., 2018). Schon (2016, P 42) talks about professional

practice having two levels of practice. The 'high ground' of theory and the 'swampy lowlands' of practice. The 'high ground' is a level of simple situations typically insignificant, that can be easily executed with learned theory. The 'swampy lowlands' are 'messy' situations practitioners face that are usually too complicated for theory alone to offer a solution. Only a true professional would have the instinct to adapt and approach these situations. As experience is gained in dealing with these 'messy' situations, the mind will develop deep rooted habits to enable practitioners to tackle the 'swampy lowlands' head on.

To continue developing professionally Socail Care Wales (2017) suggests using a professional development plan (CPD). A CPD is a way of reviewing and reflecting on your practice, giving professionals confidence in themselves that they are competent and that their skills and knowledge are kept up to date.

Values are strongly held beliefs that form the way people behave. The values people hold will be different depending on their lifestyle and profession (Mindtools, 2014). Powell (2010) discusses the values needed to be a quality early years professional. Some of the values included are; patience, confidence, understanding, caring, integrity, quality communication skills with multi agencies, commitment to continuous learning, a genuine interest in children and their development and a sense of fun for example learning through play. Taggart (2011) Believes that professionals working in care have a moral duty to hold values in ethics of care. These values are made up of empathy, compassion and sympathy. The Department for Education (2014) outlines that 'schools should promote the fundamental British values' these values include respect and tolerance of different faiths and cultures. It is important to hold such values as professional people learn from one another through observation, children observe the actions of adults which in turn influence their own behavior. Part of the role of a professional is to lead by example. If practitioners demonstrate good values children are more likely to copy, which helps shape children to grow into adults with strong positive values (Bandura et al., 2001).

Rose and Rogers (2012) says effective communication is paramount to successful practice. Rinadli (2006) Agrees Communication is a subject of high value. Clear communication with children helps practitioners to understand the wants, needs, preferences and overall wellbeing of every child. Communication can be the application of talking, effective communication is talking in a way that people can understand like listening is a way of communicating and effective listening is listening carefully to fully understand what you have heard (Siraj and Hallet, 2016). Jewson and Skinner (2024) Say that 'all behavior is communication'. Jewson and Skinner (2024) Draws on the importance of creating an environment that enables children to be 'understood' regardless of the method in which they communicate, environments that give children experiences to feel safe and supported. According to Malaguzzi (2005) children's development is reliant on the importance of collaborative communication and the relationships that exist between the child, their teachers, their families and other outside agencies.

Professional knowledge and understanding of early years go further than being educated by the curriculum. It focuses on the child being the centre of our thinking and that our contribution to their life has an influence on their enjoyment, development, safety and wellbeing (Louis, 2009). Vygotsky recommends play as the most effective way for children to learn. Learning through play supports critical thinking, creativity, language and communication skills, skills that can be used throughout their adult life (Nilsson and Ferholt, 2014). Louis (2009) talks about 'recognising the challenges of the world in which we live' and how practitioners can help to prepare children for the world around them by facilitating a learning space that offers real experiences to observe and explore the environment around them. Investigating the communities around the world help children to recognise and appreciate the similarities and differences in the multi-cultural society we live in. Professionals are expected to understand and demonstrate

the National Minimum Standards (Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, 2016). According to Safeguarding Wales (no date) safeguarding underpins practice. Practitioners have a duty to be familiar with not only the Wales Safeguarding Procedures but also their setting's own procedures and protocol concerning safeguarding Safeguarding Wales (no date).

Information sharing between professionals is at the heart of multi-agency work, the key focus is to build a picture of each person to ensure safeguarding measures are maintained (British Journal of General Practice, 2022). Research shows that relationships build over time and that it is important to collaborate to build a consistent ongoing relationship to support and influence children's learning, development, wellbeing and future success (Department for Education, 2024). Parents and carers usually express interest in having an active role in their child's learning journey, invite them to share information about their child, so that a fluid picture can be built around the child. Invite the parent or carer to stay and play, teachers meeting, PTA meeting, conversations at the school gate and offer to share the observations collected, this will allow carers to be involved in the child's learning (Department for Education, 2021). A competent professional understands their duty to safeguard people in their care (Skills for Health, 2023). Working with professionals, parents and specialists can help identify signs of additional needs; early intervention can result in noticing the symptoms much sooner and helping to support the child promptly (Care Learning, 2024).

Observations are critical assessments made when practitioners watch and listen to a child to discover their development and achievements. Observations can also be used to assess the learning environment, is it relevant and purposeful to lead learning? Through observations it is possible to develop learning plans that enable children to reach their full potential (Bruce, Louis and McCall, 2015). Ephgrave (2018) believes planning in the moment promotes child led learning, formulating impromptu planning

that engages the child's interests. Removing the need for traditional and lengthy next steps and introducing the real time 'teachable moment' when children are invited to choose their play they become highly engaged and what a professional will observe is a true reflection of that child's capability. Observations help professionals to determine whether certain behaviors are those with additional learning needs. Identifying needs at a young age promotes early intervention allowing professionals to best support the child's development in their own unique way (ProActive Approaches, 2023). Collective observation helps identify children who may need more support and if there is cause for safeguarding concern (Anna Craft Trust, no date). Observation plays a critical part in the safeguarding process and can help to recognise changes in behavior that spark cause for concern (Welsh Government, 2022).

The UNCRC underpins safeguarding policy and legislation (Williams, 2013) The UNCRC's objective is to protect children and their rights as humans, without discrimination of any kind, including ethnicity and religion. Article 28 says 'Children have the right to an education' regardless of who they are and their background (UNICEF, 2024). The Welsh Government shows adherence to the UNCRC principles by offering schemes like 'flying start' a programme committed to offering children living in disadvantaged areas 'the best start in life' (Welsh Government, 2023).

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated what it means to be a professional and how to apply professionalism into practice. It recognises the values needed as a professional and why effective communication is paramount to successful practice. Additionally, we looked at professional knowledge and understanding and that it is influential to the child's learning. Moreover, the importance of observation has also been considered. Finally, the underpinning of safeguarding, policy and legislation has been acknowledged. Based on this work, professional practice requires multiple skills and

knowledge to effectively work as a professional and meet the inclusive and individual needs of children.

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