

The Professional Practitioner

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AI Statement – I confirm no AI has been used within this module.

What is reflection and reflective practise

Reflective practice is a valuable method for Early Years professionals, involving thoughtful evaluation and analysis of their work to enhance the quality of their practice (Bolton, 2014)

Reflection and reflective practice are fundamental aspects of professional development, especially in fields such as education, healthcare, and social care. They involve regularly thinking about one's experiences to improve future actions and decisions. These practices are emphasized during professional training, as they help individuals grow and maintain high standards in their work (Brock 2015).

Reflection and reflective practice in early years education involve critically evaluating one's actions to improve practice. Practitioners reflect on how their decisions and interactions shape children's learning and development, challenging their assumptions and adjusting their approaches based on new insights. By engaging in this process, early years professionals become researchers of their own practice, continuously learning and adapting to meet children's needs. This ongoing reflection is essential for professional growth and improving the quality of early years education. (Paige-Smith, A., & Craft, A. 2011).

Why is reflective practise important to EY practise?

Reflective practice supports practitioners in growing both personally and professionally. It helps them critically examine their own actions, decisions, and approaches, leading to a deeper understanding of their work. Through this process, practitioners build greater confidence in their abilities, become more proactive in identifying and addressing challenges, and continuously improve their skills and knowledge. As a result, they are better equipped to provide high-quality care and education, ensuring that the needs of children are met in thoughtful and responsive ways (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021).

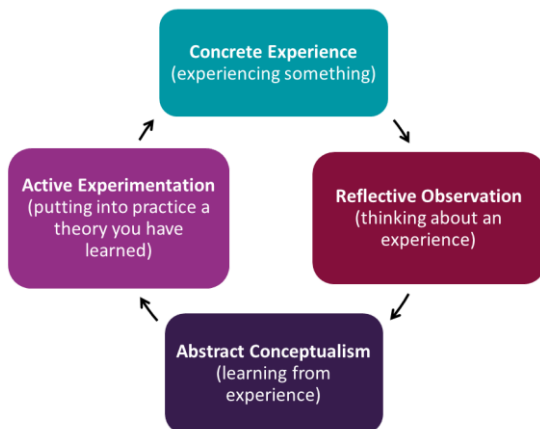
Reflective practice supports early childhood professionals in navigating the inevitable challenges of education, particularly those involving relationships with families, colleagues, and other educators. By intentionally reflecting on these interactions, educators can identify areas for improvement and develop thoughtful responses to conflict or stress. This ongoing process not only strengthens professional relationships but also encourages personal and professional growth (Boodoo, 2024).

The Theory of Reflective Practise

Several theorists support reflective practise, one being Donald Schon. Donald Schön's theory provides strong support for reflective practice by emphasizing how professionals develop their skills through both immediate and retrospective reflection. He introduced the ideas of *reflection-in-action*, where individuals adapt and make decisions while actively engaged in a task, and *reflection-on-action*, where they look back on an experience to evaluate and learn from it. Schön believed that professional environments are often unpredictable and cannot be managed through technical knowledge alone. Instead, he viewed reflective thinking as essential for navigating complex situations. His theory positions professionals not just as problem-solvers, but as lifelong learners who continually refine their practice through thoughtful reflection (Schon, D. A. 2016).

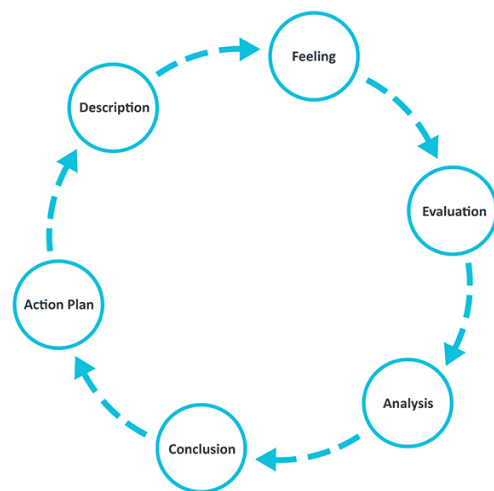
John Dewey's theory of reflection explains that we learn best by thinking carefully about our experiences, using not just logic but also our feelings and intuition. He believed that reflection is more than just problem-solving — it's a creative process where we learn by interacting with the world around us. Dewey described five steps in reflective thinking: suggestion, intellectualization, hypothesis, reasoning, and testing. He also believed that emotions are an important part of this process because they help us understand situations more deeply. In this way, reflection helps us grow, improve our practice, and change how we see things (Greenberger, S. W. 2020).

Kolb's model



(University of Hull, 2024)

Gibbs' model



(University of Edinburgh, 2024)

Analysis of Models

Kolb's learning model describes learning as a continuous cycle made up of four key stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. According to the model, an individual first has a direct experience, then reflects on it to gain deeper understanding. From this reflection, they develop new ideas or modify existing concepts, and finally, they apply what they've learned to new situations. This process helps individuals grow and improve through ongoing reflection and practical application. (University of Cambridge libraries, No Date)

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle is a structured framework that guides individuals through the process of reflection to improve future practice. It consists of six stages: Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan. Each stage encourages deeper thinking about an experience—what happened, how it felt, what was good or bad, what sense can be made of it, what could be done differently, and how to prepare for similar situations in the future. This model supports continuous learning and professional development (University of Edinburgh, 2024).

Gibbs' and Kolb's models both support reflective practice but differ in their approach and emphasis. Gibbs' model offers a more structured and detailed process, guiding the individual through specific stages, including emotional reflection and action planning. In contrast, Kolb's model is more focused on the learning process itself, highlighting how experience transforms into knowledge through a continuous cycle. While Gibbs encourages a deeper exploration of feelings and evaluation, Kolb emphasizes the role of active experimentation and understanding in learning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reflective practice is a vital aspect of professional development in Early Years education. It enables practitioners to evaluate their experiences, develop greater self-awareness, and make informed decisions that enhance the quality of care and education they provide (Bolton, 2014; Brock, 2015). By engaging in both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, as outlined by Schön (2016), professionals are better equipped to respond to the unpredictable and complex nature of their work. Dewey's (as cited in Greenberger, 2020) view further supports this by highlighting the importance of combining thought, emotion, and intuition in reflective thinking, promoting personal growth and improved professional judgement.

Models such as Kolb's learning cycle and Gibbs' reflective cycle offer practical frameworks to structure this reflective process, encouraging deeper understanding and continuous improvement. Reflective practice not only supports professional competence but also strengthens relationships with children, families, and colleagues (Boodoo, 2024; Birth to 5 Matters, 2021). Ultimately, it encourages a mindset of ongoing learning and adaptability, ensuring Early Years practitioners are well-prepared to meet the diverse and evolving needs of the children in their care.

The Professional Practitioner

Introduction

Professional practice in the early years sector involves using expert knowledge gained through education and training to support the development and learning of young children in an ethical and thoughtful way. It requires practitioners to use professional judgement, respond effectively to complex situations, and follow relevant policies and regulations. This approach also reflects a commitment to continuous learning, critical thinking, and adapting to new ideas, research, and the evolving needs of children and their families (Dyer, M. A. 2018)

Professional practice in the early years is not solely defined by qualifications, but by a blend of understanding, ethical principles, and key personal attributes that contribute to the overall development of the child. A skilled early years practitioner works in partnership with children and their families, applying a values-led approach that prioritises the child's well-being. This role also involves working closely with professionals from sectors such as education, health and social care, emphasising the value of multi-agency collaboration. Ongoing reflection, evidence-based practice, and a dedication to continuous development are central to maintaining high standards in early years settings (Reed, M., Walker, R. and Gasper, M. (2015).

Values

Professional values such as trust, respect, integrity, and social justice play a key role in shaping how early years practitioners approach their work. These values influence their behaviour, relationships, and decision-making, and are essential to building positive, supportive environments for children and families. They help practitioners understand

their wider responsibilities, including working with other professionals and safeguarding children. By committing to these values, practitioners are better able to meet the individual needs of children and contribute to their overall well-being and development, both inside and beyond the early years setting (The General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021)

Professional values are closely linked to the code of ethics in early years practice, as they provide the foundation for ethical decision-making and responsible conduct. Values such as respect, honesty, fairness, and commitment to children's well-being guide practitioners in upholding the principles outlined in the code of ethics.

The Code of Ethics helps guide early years professionals in making responsible and respectful decisions in their daily work. It highlights the importance of values like honesty, fairness, and respect when working with children, families, and colleagues. Being professional in this context means protecting children's rights, creating safe and inclusive environments, and working in partnership with others. It also involves staying up to date with research, reflecting on practice, and always aiming to improve. The code supports practitioners in acting ethically and making choices that are in the best interests of the children and families they work with (Code of Ethics, 2011).

Positive Professional Relationships

Forming positive relationships with parents and carers is a vital part of early years education, as their involvement has been shown to significantly impact a child's progress, regardless of their background. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) highlights the importance of working in partnership with families from the beginning, including during the settling-in process. Practitioners should recognise and respect parents as the child's first educators and actively involve them in their child's learning and development. Open, two-way communication builds trust and helps practitioners understand each child's unique needs and interests. This partnership can include

regular conversations, home visits, shared observations, and opportunities for parents to participate in learning activities. When sharing information, the focus should be on supporting the child's development, rather than creating unnecessary administrative tasks (Department of Education, 2021).

Effective communication is a fundamental skill for early years practitioners, enabling them to build positive relationships with children, families, colleagues, and other professionals. It involves more than just speaking clearly—it requires active listening, understanding non-verbal cues, and responding in a respectful and empathetic manner. Practitioners must be aware of their body language, tone of voice, and the physical space they share with others to ensure comfort and trust. Adapting communication styles to suit different individuals and contexts, while maintaining professionalism and cultural sensitivity, is essential. Key aspects include being genuine, non-judgmental, and respectful, as well as recognising the importance of confidentiality and avoiding stereotypes. Through thoughtful and responsive communication, practitioners support inclusive and effective interactions that benefit the wellbeing and development of children (City and Guilds, 2019).

Safeguarding and the Importance of Multi-Agency Working

Having strong knowledge and understanding is vital in early years practice as it enables professionals to meet children's individual needs, make informed decisions, and ensure effective learning and development. It also supports safeguarding by helping practitioners recognise and respond to concerns and promotes ongoing reflection and improvement in practice.

Social Care Wales (2019) state that Safeguarding in early years settings is about protecting children from harm and promoting their well-being. In Wales, the Wales Safeguarding Procedures guide professionals in applying the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, ensuring clear roles, responsibilities, and actions to keep children safe. Early years practitioners must be able to recognise signs of abuse, report

concerns, and work in partnership with families and other professionals. Safeguarding is rooted in a child-centred approach and upholds the rights of the child, as outlined in the UNCRC, ensuring every child is supported in a safe and nurturing environment.

A child-centred approach is essential in safeguarding, as it ensures children are seen as active participants in decisions that affect their lives. In line with the principles of the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, professionals must keep the child's welfare as the top priority while working closely with both the child and their family. Children can face various risks, including abuse, neglect, and exploitation. By listening to children and involving them in the safeguarding process, practitioners can better respond to their needs and create a system that reflects what children say they want from effective protection (HM Government, 2018).

Effective multi-agency working is crucial in early years settings to ensure comprehensive safeguarding and child protection. By collaborating with professionals from various disciplines, practitioners can share information, understand each other's roles, and make informed decisions that prioritize the child's welfare. This holistic approach allows for coordinated actions, timely interventions, and a unified response to potential concerns, ultimately leading to better outcomes for children and families (NSPCC Learning, 2023).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory supports multi-agency working by emphasizing how all aspects of a child's environment, both direct and indirect, influence their development (Brodie. K, 2024)

Observation and planning

The observation, assessment, and planning cycle plays a vital role in early years settings by guiding practitioners in supporting each child's learning and development. Ongoing observations help staff understand children's individual interests and progress, which then shapes meaningful and relevant learning opportunities. This process encourages collaboration between educators, families, and other

professionals, ensuring the curriculum reflects and responds to each child's unique experiences. Combining regular observations with broader assessments enables practitioners to take a well-rounded view of children's growth and adapt their strategies to better support positive outcomes (Birth to 5 Matters, No Date)

In-the-moment planning involves responding directly to children's interests during play, rather than relying on extensive pre-planning. Practitioners observe and engage with children in real-time, using teachable moments to support learning. This method minimises the need for detailed advance planning and paperwork, giving practitioners more opportunities to connect with children through meaningful interactions. By tuning into children's emerging interests, practitioners can offer a more dynamic and personalised learning environment that encourages development and nurtures a positive attitude towards learning (Arnerich, M. 2017).

The Rights of The Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international agreement that outlines the fundamental rights entitled to all children, regardless of their background. Accepted by 196 countries, it is the most widely supported human rights treaty focused on children. The Convention includes 54 articles that cover civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, ensuring that each child is protected and supported in every area of life. These rights are universal, apply to every child without discrimination, and are equally important. The UNCRC also outlines the responsibilities of adults and governments in making sure all children's rights are respected and upheld (Unicef, 2016).

Unicef (no date) informs professional practice by providing clear principles that Early Years settings are expected to uphold. For instance, Article 31 of the Convention highlights the child's right to rest, leisure, and play. This can influence policies in educational environments by guiding how schools structure break times, ensuring that

children have adequate opportunities to relax and engage in play between lessons or activities.

Article 28 of the UNCRC recognises every child's right to receive an education. It highlights the need for free primary education and encourages efforts to make education accessible to all children, while also aiming to reduce school dropout rates. In early years settings, this means ensuring that all children can access learning opportunities in a supportive and inclusive environment. Practitioners should create welcoming spaces that meet the needs of each child, encourage active participation, and help build a strong foundation for lifelong learning, regardless of a child's background or circumstances (Unicef, no date).

The rights of a child can be backed by many theorists, such as Maslow's theory of the 'Hierarchy of Needs' which demonstrates how a child needs their basic needs met in order to develop holistically (Weinberg. D.R, 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion, high-quality professional practice in the early years relies on a strong foundation of knowledge, ethical values, and reflective practice. Practitioners play a crucial role in supporting children's learning, development, and well-being by building positive relationships, ensuring effective safeguarding, and working collaboratively with families and professionals. Through observation, planning, and a child-centred approach, educators can meet individual needs and uphold children's rights as outlined in the UNCRC. By committing to ongoing professional development and ethical practice, early years practitioners help create inclusive, nurturing environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

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No	Improvement and development goals	Success criteria	Actions to achieve this goal	Timeli ne	What will this help me achieve	Achievements
1	Complete my workplace training for medication administration.	I will be confident and competent at administering medication. I will have passed all training and achieved the medication administration certificate.	Set time aside to complete my training and take on some extra shifts to ensure all the observations are complete. I need 5 observations to pass this module once the training is completed	2 months	This will be an extra qualification, which means I will be better paid and therefore more financially comfortable. It will improve my self-esteem as I will feel more helpful in work and more capable.	1 month – Online training complete. 6 weeks – All observations completed 2 months – completed goal
2	Focus on my mental health and wellbeing	I will be calmer, happier and more able to deal with everyday stressors.	Ensure I set aside time for myself, to go for walks and have fresh air. Accept support from family and friends when offered.	Ongoing	Improved mental health will mean I have more energy for myself, but also for my children. This means I will be more capable and able to remain a calm, gentle parent to them and be a better role model.	1 month – in a routine of attending yoga every Thursday.
3	Improve my diet and fitness levels	I will have a healthier, more balanced diet, and have more energy for everyday life. I will have a better sleeping pattern and feel more rested in the days.	Take steps to improve my activity levels, such as joining the gym or a fitness club. Walk instead of driving whenever possible. Meal plan and prep throughout the week to ensure I am not getting take-away food for convenience	Ongoing	Increased energy throughout the week means I will be more able to keep up with housework, coursework and the children. This will have a positive effect on many other aspects of life, particularly my mental health and wellbeing.	2 weeks – have started a rolling meal plan with healthy family meals. 4 weeks – Started going to the gym twice a week.
4	Complete my Early years education and care degree	I will have completed and passed every module of the course.	Ensure I utilise all the support available to me, such as study skills workshops and tutorials with module lecturers. Organise childcare so that I am able to attend every lecture and have time to complete assignments.	3 years	I will have a degree in Early Years Education and Care, which means I will be able to broaden my career options. I will be able to apply to complete my PGCE and become a teacher if this is what I wish once the degree is complete.	9 months – I have completed the first year of my degree.

