

Recognising and Analysing the Significance of Professional Practice in Meeting the Individual and Inclusive Needs of Children

Professional practice in Early Years (EY) education encompasses a range of connected aspects that collectively impact the holistic development and well-being of children. This is highlighted in the significance of key aspects of professional practice including professional values, communication, multiagency work, observations, planning, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and scrutinizes the importance of meeting the individual and inclusive needs of children. By understanding and implementing these elements effectively, EY practitioners can create nurturing, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate environments for all children. With a determination to ensure that all professionals work collaboratively to support all children in their foundation years, ensuring that they are the priority and that they will have all the tools to meet their full potential.

Professional values are the ethical principles and standards that guide EY practitioners in their daily interactions and decision-making. These values include respect, integrity, empathy, inclusivity, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Maintaining professional values ensures that children are treated with dignity and fairness, fostering a safe and supportive environment. For example, respecting each child's background and individual needs promotes a sense of belonging and self-worth. Professional values also underpin the development of trust between practitioners, children, and families, which is essential for effective collaboration and support.

It is imperative that children get off to the best start. Important to families, schools, society and, most importantly, the children. The current fragility of the EY sector puts that goal in jeopardy. Simply offering up unused classrooms where pupil numbers are falling will not substantively change that. Senior leaders will need to drive this initiative forward. Reimagining professionalism and the role of schools in the EY offers a more positive way forward. At school level, this is about extending professionalism and leading the local system of early education and care beyond the school gate. The National Professional Qualification for Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL) includes an important emphasis on working in partnership with different agencies and services. This could be

extended to include locality-based partnership work across the sectors in EY, focused on professional development.

Effective communication, with a cautious awareness of the audience's capacity, is fundamental in the EY settings. It involves appropriate verbal and non-verbal interactions with children, parents, colleagues, and all other professionals involved with the family and child. Clear, respectful, and effective communication helps build strong relationships, supports children's language development, and ensures that information is accurately shared among stakeholders. For instance, active listening and open and transparent communication with parents can provide valuable insights into a child's needs, preferences, and home environment. Additionally, using age and stage-appropriate language and visual aids will enhance children's understanding and participation, promoting inclusivity and engagement.

Multi-agency work refers to professional collaboration between various agencies and services to support children's development and well-being. This approach is particularly important for children with additional learning needs, as it ensures a coordinated and holistic approach. Working with health visitors, speech and language therapists, social workers, and educational psychologists (along with any other relevant professional agency) allows practitioners to access specialist knowledge and resources. Effective multi-agency collaboration can lead to early identification of issues, timely interventions, and consistent support across different settings. It also reinforces the principle of shared responsibility in promoting children's rights and welfare.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, Order 2023, says that local authorities should provide effective support for pupils who are under the age of mandatory school age, therefore a local authority can expect its EY ALNLO to establish collaborative working relationships with others who work with its ALNLO

Chapter 10: Role of the EY Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer cohort and raise awareness of ALN, the ALN system and how it applies to this cohort. The EY ALNLO should establish collaborative working relationships with the following: (a) those that work with the authority's ALNLO cohort, including, as appropriate non-maintained providers of nursery education, childcare providers, relevant umbrella organisations and any other agencies or services that work closely with such children and their families (for example, health bodies and practitioners etc) (b) the ALNCOs of maintained schools and

relevant staff at special schools that children in the authority's ALNLO cohort might go on to attend. The EY ALNLO should be expected to promote collaboration between these persons and the local authority, including to support successful transitions for children between settings that provide non maintained nursery education or childcare and into school.' (ALN Code for Wales 2021)

Observations are a critical tool in EY practice, enabling practitioners to understand each child's stage of development, interests, and needs. Through systematic observation, practitioners can gather evidence to inform planning, assess progress, and identify any areas of development, requiring additional support. Observations also help in recognising patterns of behaviour, learning styles, and social interactions. By documenting and reflecting on these observations, practitioners can tailor their approaches to support individual learning journeys and ensure that all children are included and valued.

There are four guiding principles that should shape practice in EY. These are:

- Every child is unique, they are constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.
- Through positive relationships children learn to be strong and independent.
- Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- Importance of learning and development. Children develop and learn at different rates.

'The framework covers the education and care of all children, including children with special educational needs and disabilities *SEND equivalent to *ALN in Wales.' (EYFS statutory framework effective Sept 2025).

An awareness that 'all children deserve the care and support they need to have the best start in life. Children learn and develop at a faster rate from birth to five years old than at any other time in their lives, so their experiences in EY have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe, and happy childhood is important in its own right.

Good parenting and high-quality early learning provide the foundation children need to fulfil their potential.’ (EYFS statutory framework, effective Sept 2025).

Planning, in EY settings, involves designing and implementing activities and experiences that promote children's learning and development. Effective planning is responsive, inclusive, and based on observations and assessments. It ensures that the curriculum is relevant, engaging, and accessible to all children, including those with additional needs. Planning also involves setting clear learning objectives, differentiating instruction, and creating an enabling environment. By involving children and families in the planning process, practitioners can ensure that the provision reflects diverse interests, cultures, and abilities.

‘The EYFS sets the standards that all EY providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children’s ‘school readiness’ and gives children the right foundation for good future progress through school and life. The EYFS is about what children learn, as well as how they learn. Effective practice is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other and through adult-guided learning.’ (EYFS statutory framework, effective Sept 2025).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a key international treaty that outlines the rights of children and provides a framework for ensuring their protection, development, and participation. In EY practice, the UNCRC underpins the commitment to uphold children's rights to education, play, safety, and expression. Article 3 of the document emphasizes prioritizing the interests of the child. That this must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them. By aligning practice with the UNCRC, practitioners affirm their role as advocates for children's rights and ensure that their work promotes equity, inclusion, and respect for diversity.

In conclusion, the various aspects of professional practice, including professional values, communication, multiagency collaboration, observations, planning, and strict adherence to the UNCRC are integral to meeting the individual and inclusive needs of children in education, especially in EY settings. These professionals work together to create environments where all children can thrive, feel valued, and reach their full potential. By embracing reflective and ethical practice, EY professionals can contribute to developing a more inclusive and effective educational environment.

All children are entitled to feel safe – ‘Safeguarding’ is protecting children from abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm, and educating adults to recognise the signs and dangers. Safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children attending an education setting is defined as:

‘Safeguarding in Wales involves a comprehensive approach to protect and promote the welfare of children and young people. It includes the following key aspects:

Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP): Every education provision setting in Wales should have a DSP with lead responsibility for safeguarding. The DSP works with other agencies to support effective multi-agency work and contributes to coordinated responses to meet the needs of young people. Education settings have a legal duty to protect and promote young people’s well-being up until the age of 18. This includes safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in Wales. All school and college governors or management committees should have relevant safeguarding and child protection training, including the Keeping Learners Safe (2021) modules. Local authorities, governing bodies, and proprietors of independent schools must have arrangements for exercising their functions to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Wales.’ Keeping learners safe The Education Act 2002

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What is reflection and reflective practise?

Reflection is understanding that practises may not always work out in the way one may hope and have a way for one to adapt practises for an alternative outcome for future activities within the EY. There is a long-standing practise within the EY sector or reflecting on practise to ensure learning is nurtured and the learning and development is stimulated.

Care Inspectorate Wales say 'we support improvement, and we want to empower services to evaluate their own performance. The Self-evaluation guide helps services across all care settings understand how they can do that. We believe that self-evaluation can be a powerful tool to identify what's working well and to identify and support improvement.' The Care Inspectorate Wales want all services to undertake self-evaluation. They add, 'we see self-evaluation as a process that the care service leads on and it is for you to determine the frequency and focus of a partitioner's self-evaluation. Self-evaluation is not undertaken for the benefit of the Care Inspectorate; it should be used by those professionals to inform and understand where there is need to target the efforts to support improvement. Care Inspectorate (2019)

Why is reflective practise important to EY practise?

Reflective practise is used to ensure changes to practise can be justified whilst working in an EY setting in a professional capacity. Professional development relies heavily on reflective practise, and this is expected to become embedded within everyday functioning of the EY sector. All professionals involved within the EY sector must be able to reflect on practise. Reflective practice is vital in EY settings for several reasons:

Improves child outcomes: By reflecting on what works and what doesn't, professionals can tailor their approaches to meet individual needs (Showcase Training, 2023).

Supports professional growth: Practitioners develop deeper understanding of pedagogy and refine their skills (ZERO TO THREE, 2024).

Promotes quality care: Reflection ensures that practices align with current standards and best practices (StoryChanges, 2025).

Encourages emotional resilience: Reflecting on challenges helps educators manage stress and avoid burnout (Rasmussen University, 2024).

The theory of reflective practise:

'Reflective practise is the ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning.' – D. Schon (1983)

'The cycle of reflective practise explains how individuals learn through a continuous process of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and experimenting.' D. Kolb (1984)

'Imagine that you come home at the end of a really bad week where everything possible has gone wrong. When you walk in the front door you are confronted with a time machine which can take you back to Monday morning so you can live the whole week over again.' D. Shon (1983). In an ideal world, this would be an opportunity to think about those things that went wrong, didn't work or were less successful that had been hoped. The theories around reflective practise query what could be done differently (if anything) to correct those things or trying to repeat the things that have gone well. Shon also mentions, 'it may not seem like it, but this is reflective practise - the act of thinking about our experiences in order to learn from them for the future.' In reality there are no such things as time machines, preventing the opportunity to go back to a previous time to amend an experience, but one can still work towards being a reflective practitioner. Opportunities to reflect, to undertake activities, thinking about experiences, learning from them and developing an action plan for what will be done differently in the future.

Analysis of models – compare/contrast/pros/cons:



The University of Hull states that Kolb's (1984) cycle of reflective practise is a model designed to help people learn from their experiences. It can be used as a basis for the structure of a reflective essay, or as a way to structure your thinking. Kolb's model is based on four stages, requiring you to work through each one before the cycle leads to new experiences and loops back around:

1) Concrete Experience 2) Reflective Observation 3) Abstract Conceptualism 4) Active Experimentation



The University of Hull goes on to state that **Gibbs' Reflective Cycle**, which is similar to Kolb's **Learning Cycle**, Gibbs (1988) **Reflective Cycle** also provides a structure for a reflectively written essay.

The structure of a piece of reflective writing, whether it be an essay or learning log entry, typically consists of six components or paragraphs that follow Gibb's cycle:

1) Description 2) Feelings 3) Evaluation 4) Analysis 5) Conclusion 6) Action Plan

'Despite the further breakdown, it can be argued that this model could still result in fairly superficial reflection as it doesn't refer to critical thinking/analysis or reflection. You could legitimately respond to the question 'What would you do next time?' by answering that you would do the same, but does that constitute deep level reflection?' *Open University* (2014) in *OpenLearn*

Conclusion

Whilst reflecting on everyday practises, it is apparent that both Gibbs and Kolb models can be effectively utilised to support reflective and evaluative decisions. One predominantly has an emotional focus: it considers the reflector and the impact of the event on their emotional drivers, whilst the other provides opportunities to consider how success could be achieved by amending practises: how might one have adjusted things to improve and amend the outcome? Successful self-development is underpinned by all reflective practices. This reflective practise ultimately supports the successful development of the professional practitioner. It allows for less successful experiences to not be repeated and the more successful experiences to be planned for again in the future.

References:

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What do I know already / Beth ydw i'n ei wybod eisoes: Basic but developing Business Manager role and expected daily tasks. Basic use of everyday functions within the new Arbor MIS system.

How to use resources to support academic skills.

Initial skills linked to university course work.

What have I learnt so far / Beth ydw i wedi'i ddysgu hyd yn hyn: Maintaining the Business Manager role within a primary school is complex and requires organisation. The current / new MIS system is user friendly, but there are many more functions available with further support and training which will support the Business Manager role within the setting.

Effective use of basic academic skills such as time management will support not only the business role, but personal tasks also.

What do I want to develop / Beth ydw i eisiau ei ddatblygu: A confident, secure awareness enabling me to teach some basic skills to the staff within my school setting. A confident, able application of the system to manage all available functions, such as reporting, data sharing etc.

A strong set of academic skills, utilising time management to support my everyday working and personal life.

Further education to gain a higher qualification, leading to a degree qualification.

Objective / Gwrthrychol	Actions (How will I achieve this objective/ what needs to be done?)	Resources (What support and resources are needed to achieve this objective?)	Target Date for achieving objective	Success criteria (How will I know I have achieved this goal, how will I review this?)
	Camau gweithredu (Sut byddaf yn cyflawni'r amcan hwn/beth sydd angen ei wneud?)	Adnoddau (Pa gefnogaeth ac adnoddau sydd eu hangen i gyflawni'r amcan hwn?)	Dyddiad Targed ar gyfer cyflawni amcan	Meini prawf llwyddiant (Sut byddaf yn gwybod fy mod wedi cyflawni'r nod hwn, sut byddaf yn adolygu hyn?)
<i>Increase prior knowledge - becoming more familiar with the new Arbor MIS system linked to school data.</i>	Attend all available training sessions. Read support modules.	Monitor and review the training modules provided by the IT department in the Local Authority.	January 2026 – offer training sessions to staff to encourage use of the communication functions within the MIS system.	Staff will feel confident to initially add details such as: communication and behaviour notes to a pupil's profile without support.

	Request support from others in the same role in alternative schools. Practise updating the data.	Reach out to those also performing a similar role to myself.		
<i>Develop and apply academic skills such as 'Effective Time Management'</i>	Continue to research the benefits of academic skills. Utilise all available resources.	Use of online and physical resources, such as online calendars, academic calendars and diaries, discuss concerns with relevant individuals who could offer support ie, lecturers, University support staff and fellow students where applicable etc.	March 2026 – by this point in my studying journey, I would hope to have further developed my academic skills to a point where my studies become less daunting and the feeling of overwhelm is significantly reduced.	My emotional overwhelm will feel reduced, the anxiety around starting an assignment will be considerably reduced and the idea of completing the qualification will feel more achievable.
<i>To successfully complete the Early Years Education and Care degree in 2027.</i>	Attend as many lectures as I am available for. Utilise all supportive resources, PowerPoints, videos and written guidance.	ICT support and library support staff along with all lecturers will be invaluable to enable the best outcome. Use of suggested resources i.e. Harvard Cite Them Right, all suggested reading resources along with researching alternatives.	July 2027 – this will be the end of the course all being well.	I will successfully complete all assignments, reviewing and applying feedback. I will get to the end of the course graduating and having achieved the expected qualification.